

# Gleams and Glooms :

A STORY OF 1905.

BY

BABBIE THE EGYPTIAN.

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Mr A. S. Campbell  
"Fridothian"

Blue's Point Rd

North Sydney

3 Oct 1910

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# GLEAMS AND GLOOMS:

A STORY OF 1905.

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By **BABBIE THE EGYPTIAN.**

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE NEST AND ITS OCCUPANTS.

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A region of repose it seems.

A place of slumber and of dreams.

It was not publicly known as The Nest; indeed, neither of its intending occupants ever called it by that name, even to each other. But in their hearts both regarded it as the abode of all peace and love. Possibly they were foolish in so thinking, certainly they were inexperienced.

The cottage stood on an acre of ground situated in the heart of a fashionable street. On both sides of the humble habitation, patrician, though modern dwellings, looked down upon it, seeming to scorn the ivy-clad walls and old-fashioned structure. The inhabitants of these residences cherished a grudge—not a secret one—against the owner of the offending cottage. If he did not wish to build a worthy house upon the ground, then let him sell it. Several offers had been made to him, but thus far none had been accepted. It was a thorough shame to have such a disreputable building in the neighbourhood. Added to this was another even more disagreeable fact; small, old-fashioned houses, although situated in aristocratic streets, do not command enormous rents. Hence Mr Fitzjames on the one hand and Mr Symthe-Gerald on the other, might easily pay their weekly two guineas for the use of their smart residences, while plain Mr Jones, living in the despised cottage, paid the moderate rent of 10s out of his humble salary. Perhaps

this last fact was the most annoying of the two, for notwithstanding the undeniable shabbiness of Holloway's cottage, the magnificent trees and rambling shrubs which surrounded it gave a certain picturesqueness to the street. But who would think of poverty-stricken neighbours—or worse still—of tradespeople in the midst? Certainly not the people who dwelt in Gladstone street, Dunedin. Thus it came about that the inhabitants of The Nest never received the attention due to newcomers.

For some time The Nest had been without a tenant, and the Gladstonites had commenced to hope that its owner was tired of his past policy and that he intended either to build or sell. Alas, for the expectations of the sanguine!

Just a week before our introduction to the neighbourhood, a young man had called upon Holloway's agents for the purpose of renting the cottage. He had arrived at perfectly satisfactory arrangements, and when he left the office he carried with him the key of the old house and a receipt stating that he had paid in advance one month's rent.

Of course the interested neighbours were not aware of this little transaction, but that very evening they discovered a light in the windows of The Nest, and discerning, groaned in spirit. One consolation was granted to them: the newcomers seemed eminently respectable.

Every evening after the one on which the light was first noticed an old and a young lady, accompanied by a young man, who might be either the brother or lover of the

young lady—for some reason the observant neighbours judged him to be the latter—wended their way past the aristocratic residences and entered the dilapidated gate of Holloway's cottage.

On this particular evening the trio had come to view the completion of their labour of love. All through the week they had been toiling to produce a certain result. Now their task was finished. The linings of The Nest had been reduced to the necessary order, and all that remained was that its intending occupants should take up their abode.

Max Maitland stood alone in the little sitting room, surveying it with perfect satisfaction. Surely Naomi was a fairy! How wonderfully she had transformed the house! He stepped over to the old-fashioned window and threw it open. Then he sat down on the sill and heaved a great sigh. Someone coming in from the kitchen heard it, and drew back in mock consternation.

"Is it as bad as that?" she asked, teasingly. "Even now, at the eleventh hour, it is not too late to turn back."

Max turned a happy face to the newcomer. "Come here, Naomi, and sit down beside me," he said.

But Naomi kept her distance. "No," she answered, demurely, "Aunt is up in the attic and may be down any moment. Besides, the lamp is lighted."

The boy—he was scarcely more—sprang to his feet, and with a dexterous movement turned down the lamp.

"Come now, Miss Prudence," he said, coaxingly.

"But aunt," objected Naomi allowing herself to be drawn to the window.

"Aunt knows enough about sweethearts to leave us alone for a good long time, and then to make considerable fuss before appearing," asserted Max, seating himself beside her and drawing the pretty brown head very close to himself.

"I believe she does," Naomi admitted; "she is a dear old soul."

"Yes," Max assented absently, his thoughts far more intent upon the dear old soul's niece than upon that individual herself.

There was silence for the space of ten minutes—these two young people were too happy for speech—then Naomi spoke very softly. "Max, dear, are you content?"

"Yes," he answered, and his face lost the boyish look that Naomi loved to see, and became almost stern in its manliness. "Yes, little woman mine, I am abundantly content. God grant that you may always be as completely satisfied as I am."

The girl pressed a little nearer to him. It was all very solemn, notwithstanding her love for him.

"What if we fail to make each other happy?" she whispered, and the man detected a tremour in her voice. Somehow the question hurt him. He pushed the girl away very gently, and looked into her eyes. That which he read therein removed his momentary pain.

"Perfect love casteth out fear," he answered, drawing her back. "Are you afraid?"

"No," with a little catch in her breath; "but our happiness seems too great to last. Perhaps I shall disappoint you." But Max took immediate and effectual means to render further speech impossible. In confidence, allow me to state that it was a lengthy business, and one rather to Naomi's liking.

"You are a very foolish fellow," she said, breathlessly, when speech became possible; "not nearly sedate enough to become a benedict."

"But you like foolish fellows," Max answered, audaciously, "and although you wish me to become a benedict, you do not desire to see me a serious one. Confess, sweetheart."

"My dear boy!" rising from the sill with great dignity. "You almost said that I entrapped you into the contemplation of matrimony."

"Nonsense, I know you are the victim," with irresistible frankness—"don't stay there, dearie. Remember you go away to-morrow for a whole week."

Naomi became penitent instantly. "It is wretched, but I suppose it is necessary," she said, disconsolately, coming back and standing by her lover.



Max looked into the pretty, trustful face, then bending down kissed her on the lips. "It will be a long week," he said, and drew a deep breath.

"What did that express?" the girl asked quickly.

"I do not quite know; it came. I can scarcely contain myself to-night. In a few days you will be mine, my wife. Come outside, Naomi, I must have room to give my happiness full play."

"Silly boy," she said, smiling, but speaking in a very shaky voice. "I am only a foolish girl, and yet you love me better than anything else."

"Better than my life, dearie," he assured her gravely, and then hand in hand they stepped out on to the wide verandah, each feeling that they were in the Garden of Eden, forgetful at that moment of everything but the divine spell of love.

Happy Adam! Happy Eve!

## CHAPTER II.

### ROBERT MILLER.

Without hearts there is no home.—Byron.

Naomi felt very desolate as she stepped off the train at the quiet country station of Fuiton. She had left Max behind her in Dunedin, moreover, there was no one in sight save the stationmaster. Him she approached rather anxiously and inquired if Mr Robert Miller had been about the township that day. The official was an elderly man with a shrewd, kind face. He looked keenly at his questioner as though struck by her appearance, and answered in the negative; then turned his eyes in the direction in which Briarwood Farm was situated, and carefully examined the road.

"There is something moving over yonder," he stated—"a bicycle, I think. Probably Mr Miller is the rider."

Naomi uttered a dismayed exclamation. The farm was fully four miles away, and the prospect of such a long walk dismayed her. Black was sympathetic, but puzzled. "Did Mr Miller know you were coming?" he asked, looking curiously at the winsome face and wondering as to the girl's identity.

"Yes," was the frank answer. "I am his sister-in-law."

Casual curiosity disappeared from the keen eyes of the stationmaster, and kindly interest took its place. "You are Miss Binnie," he exclaimed, and added warmly. "I am glad you have come. Miller needs shaking up. He has been a different man since his wife's death."

"I feared that," Naomi returned sadly. "His letters have been so strangely morbid." She hesitated, and then after another look at the trustworthy face turned to hers, continued impulsively: "Tell me about him. I have only a week to stay, and I wish in that time to do him as much good as is possible."

Thus appealed to, Black looked thoughtful, finally he answered: "You say his letters have been morbid, and I think that morbidness is his greatest trouble. His thoughts dwell continuously on the past, and he seems to long for death also. The children don't reach him. In short, he nurses his grief."

Naomi understood, and the pity of it softened her eyes wonderfully as she looked toward the oncoming cyclist. "Poor Bob," she said, wistfully. "I would like to help him."

In a very little while Miller wheeled his bicycle into the station and greeted his sister-in-law cordially.

"It is very good of you to spare me this week," he said, gratefully. "I would not have asked it had I not needed your help."

"Never mind that until we reach home," Naomi answered, and added cheerily, "I am longing for a cup of tea and one of Hannah's scones." Hannah was a distant relative of Miller's. In the old days, before his marriage, she had been his housekeeper, and during the young wife's reign the old woman had greatly assisted her. Now the first order had returned, and Hannah held complete sway.

Recalled to their present need, Miller hastened to explain. "I am sorry to be late," he said. "I set out in the gig, but at the first corner the horse shied, and the shafts were badly smashed. I had to go

back, and then ride over on my bicycle. You can ride?"

"Yes," rather doubtfully; "but scarcely on that," pointing to the machine on which he himself had ridden.

He laughed. "Certainly not, but I know where to borrow one suited to your needs."

Bidding the genial stationmaster good-bye, the two moved along the road. Presently Miller stopped in front of the schoolhouse. "My cousin, Ellice M'Pherson, lives here," he said. "She is school mistress. I'll borrow her machine for you. Will you come in with me or do you prefer to remain here?"

"I'd rather remain here," Naomi confessed. "Please hurry, Bob, I want to get home and see the children."

Miller's face darkened. "There is no home now, Naomi," he said, bitterly. "What are children when a man is heart-broken?"

The girl looked at him reproachfully. "They are Grace's children," she reminded him, "left by her to you."

The shadow lifted a little. "Poor little mites," he said, "it is hard for them, too; but, then, they don't understand."

He walked slowly down the path until he reached the schoolhouse. Naomi saw the door open and a girlish figure appear. The opened door let loose the sound of infant voices repeating a doggerel. The girl at the gate smiled unconsciously as the uneven volume of sound fell upon her ears. Her thoughts had flown back to her own schooldays; but only for an instant did they linger there. Someone has said that schooldays with their innocence and freedom from care are the happiest of our experiences. But I do not so think, neither did Naomi, her thoughts wandered back to the present, with Max, lifeseize, in the foreground, and a deep gladness shone in her eyes. What does the careless gaiety of schooldays count against the knowledge of mutual love, although that knowledge of necessity brings with it a certain amount of pain and an infinite weight of responsibility?

Ellice M'Pherson accompanied her cousin back to the gate, and Naomi subjected her

to a severe scrutiny. She had heard much of this girl, and it had not all been to her credit. Certainly the school teacher was not pretty: her features were large and irregular, her complexion pale andreckled, but she carried herself well. The girl at the gate noted these things, but could form no estimate of the other's character. She needed to look into her eyes, and in them read the soul's secret.

"This is Grace's sister," Miller said. His kinswoman looked kindly at the younger girl. "You are very like Grace," she commented, and added, sincerely: "I am very glad to meet you."

Miss Binnie looked steadily into the grey eyes that greeted her so frankly, and was satisfied. She extended her hand with friendly warmth. "And I am glad to meet you," she returned.

Henceforth the rumours that were current concerning Ellice M'Pherson's preference for Robert Miller never troubled the impulsive, warm-hearted girl. In the Scotchwoman's eyes she read womanliness and truth. Dame Rumour continually spreads hurtful tales, and very often they lack foundation. Certainly, the one which sought to take from the village school-mistress her fair name was entirely false.

After a few moments' conversation, Ellice returned to her duty, and the other two rode quickly toward Briarwood Farm. Both were silent. Naomi was thinking of her dead sister. She had always wished to visit Grace's home, and now that her wish was fulfilled, Grace had left it. It was heartbreaking, and the girl's eyes overflowed. She stole a glance at her companion, and her heart bled for him as she noted the wistful pain in his face. To him also memory was bringing painful recollections. Soon they had reached the farm, and their young aunt drew both of the twins within her arms. It was their first meeting. The bairns were only three years old, and they could not understand the tears that glistened on the girl's dark lashes. With childish concern they sought to console her.

"Is you cold, auntie?" Eva asked, tenderly. "Come to Hainah to get warmed."

"There is a big fire in there," Roy insinuated, earnestly. And Naomi was led captive into the cheery sitting room where old Hannah sat sewing by a bright fire. She greeted Miss Binnie warmly, and then bustled about to make the tea. Very soon Naomi was partaking of a substantial repast. Halfway through she looked up brightly and contrived to win the old dame's heart.

"These scones are excellent," she asserted. "Grace described them to me in one of her letters, but I had no idea of their wonderful excellence."

A gratified smile appeared on the wrinkled visage—we all like to be appreciated even if it be as scone-bakers, and the old woman was no exception to the rule. "I can bake scones," she replied, complacently; "but," with an ominous shake of the head, "I cannot manage Robert Miller. I hope you'll do him good, my dear."

Naomi looked dubious. "I am not sure," she said; "but if it is in my power to do so, I shall."

This was her fixed determination, and that evening as she and her brother-in-law held a conference, it was severely put to the test. He desired her to take complete charge of the twins for a year, during which time he intended to go to the Old Country.

"I must go away," he said, decidedly. "I cannot face the routine here, by myself—not just now. Moreover, Dr Stanton advises me to go for a trip. He says that I am completely unnerved, that I need a sea voyage and a complete change. If you will take care of the children, I can easily arrange everything else. James McPherson, Ellice's brother, will manage the farm for me, and Hannah will see after the house. But unless you will consent to mother the children, I shall stay here. I cannot leave Grace's little ones with strangers."

The girl's mind was in a whirl. That which he asked of her meant much sacrifice not only for herself, but for Max also. The twins were dear little things, but to contemplate leaving them in her own home for a year was a very serious matter, and one which she felt inclined to refuse to

consider. But Grace's face rose up before her, and pleaded for the motherless bairns.

Finally she spoke: "If Max consents, I shall do as you ask; but I shall not write about the matter. When we are married I shall tell him, and he shall decide."

"Thank you," the man answered, gratefully. "It is a great deal to ask of you, but I cannot do anything else. If I stay here I shall go melancholy mad, and I cannot leave the youngsters with Hannah."

The subject was dismissed after Miller had mentioned liberal terms, and had stated that he wished to leave home in a month's time. With a troubled heart the girl stole into the room in which the twins slept. Side by side stood two small cots, and in each of these a little white figure sat, impatient for Naomi's coming.

"I knew you'd come," sleepily asserted Eva, "but Hannah said you would not."

"Well, say prayers now," called another little voice, and in an instant both children were repeating a childish prayer. "Mother taught us," explained Roy, "and Eve and me always say it, but nobody listens."

"I knew you would," again said Eve, and then she curled in among the blankets and was off into dreamland before Naomi kissed her flushed face. Not so Roy, he looked into his young aunt's eyes and put his fat little arms round her neck.

"Stay with us, auntie Nomi," he pleaded, and as she kissed him good-night Naomi knew that unless Max very much objected, she would mother the youngsters during the coming twelvemonths. As she remembered the peaceful cottage, she experienced regret—her decision was a farewell to order and quietness, and these are very dear to the soul of a woman until her own bairns create a riot.

### CHAPTER III. NEWS.

Love, that of every woman's heart  
Will have the whole and not a part.  
That is to her in Nature's plan,  
More than ambition is to man.

—Longfellow.

Mrs Leslie looked compassionately at her niece. "Dearie," she said, gently, "don't

despair. It is not so dreadful after all. What if he had been injured for life?"

Naomi turned fiercely on her would-be comforter. "Don't talk to me of comfort," she commanded. "My poor Max." She buried her face in her hands and indulged in rebellious thoughts. Why had God allowed this thing to come upon them? Yesterday the world had seemed such a happy place, and now, Max was lying helpless on an invalid's couch. Poor little woman, the cup of bliss which had seemed so full was not unmixed with pain.

Maitland was a clerk in a mercantile office, and he had been sent by his employer to Mosgiel. When returning the train in which he was travelling collided with another. At first Max had appeared uninjured, but on the following day he had felt peculiar symptoms, and the doctor whom he consulted had informed him that he was suffering from a kind of paralysis, called "railway spine," and caused by the shock of the concussion. These facts Mrs Leslie had come to Briarwood Farm to break to her niece. Very kindly had the news been told, but it had aged Naomi. The happy light in her eyes was quenched, and her face was drawn with pain.

"How long will this accident affect him?" she asked, in a tense voice.

"Six months. The doctor says that at the end of that time he will be himself again."

"You say that his spine is paralysed," the girl continued, her lips quivering; "are his limbs affected?"

"To some extent; but the doctor thinks that in a month or two at the latest, power will be restored to them," was Mrs Leslie's gentle answer. Her heart was full of pity for the young couple.

"We shall go back this evening," Naomi announced, after a painful silence, "my place is with him."

"Yes," was the older woman's answer. "He needs you."

Poor little bride-elect. Dry-eyed, she packed her belongings and then sat down on her bed to think. Very often during the last week she had acted similarly; but how different had been the trend of her thoughts! Then she had dreamed of

the Utopia which she and Max were to enter; now pain tortured her—Max was crippled. Sympathy with him filled her heart. How awful a trial his enforced inactivity would be to him! He was so alert, so energetic. Suddenly a new and terrible thought occurred to her. What if he should refuse to marry her on the day appointed? She could not bear to leave him to the care of others, but perhaps he would refuse to burden her. Her lips closed firmly. He must not so act: she would use every womanly art and every sweet persuasion to prevent him separating himself from her.

A knock at the door interrupted her at this juncture, and Mrs Leslie entered. Put your outdoor things on now," she said, briskly. "Bob will be round with the gig in a few minutes."

Naomi obeyed silently, and very shortly the three were driving toward the station. The six hours' journey which followed seemed endless to Naomi. Mrs Leslie and she were the only occupants that the carriage contained, with the exception of a rough-looking elderly man who joined them at a side station. His eyes rested constantly on Naomi's face, and only her evident desire for silence arrested the words which were at the end of his tongue. Presently he unfolded a paper and became absorbed in its contents, apparently. In reality, his eyes noted every movement of his fellow-passengers, and his ears were on the alert. At the sound of Naomi's voice as she replied to a question asked by Mrs Leslie, the man started.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, under his breath, "it is Ruth's voice." After this he abandoned the paper and sat with half-closed eyes.

Wrapt in her own gloomy thoughts, Naomi did not observe the attention which was bestowed upon her, but Mrs Leslie noticed the furtive scrutiny, and was made curious thereby.

At last the anxious traveller's time of torturing inactivity was ended. Dunedin was reached. Mrs Leslie shivered as she stepped out into the cold morning air, but Naomi was feverishly warm. The two went in search of a conveyance, and suc-

ceeded in finding an express. Upon this they placed their luggage, and then themselves climbed into it. Mrs Leslie instructed the driver to drive to Holloway's Cottage, Gladstone street. Their destination reached, Naomi trembled. How could she be brave in sight of Max's helplessness? Yet her heart longed to comfort him.

An old woman, with whom Max had lodged, was with him. She was pleased to welcome Miss Binnie, and immediately ushered her into the bedroom. The man, lying amid the white draperies, welcomed her with his eyes. She kissed him tenderly and then sank on her knees by the bed, her face pressed to his. Silence reigned. In that moment rebellion died in Naomi's heart, and a great thankfulness surged within her. Max was still left to her. It was hard to speak, and the girl gently raised her head and looked into his eyes.

"Darling mine," she whispered, after a long searching look into the troubled depths of those other brown eyes which had always been eloquent of love and truth when turned in her direction—"this thing is going to bring us nearer to each other than we have ever been."

He made no answer, and Naomi drew her fingers through his thick, dark hair. The tender touch comforted him as he had not been comforted since the doctor gave his verdict.

"Little wife," he whispered, "you are a wonderful compensation for this, as well as for every other ill."

She smiled faintly, and proceeded to mother him to her heart's content, to Max's also. Half an hour was profitably spent in this occupation; but Naomi was anxious. She was very much afraid that Max meant to postpone their wedding.

"I will be with you very often during the next few days," she ventured, softly—"and then always. Will I always be a compensation, dear?"

Of course, he replied quickly, but gravely, and then followed a gloomy silence which confirmed the girl's fear. Presently he continued, with difficulty: "We cannot be married on the 20th as we intended."

"Why?" asked Naomi, quickly.

"Because of this accident, dearie," his voice was very tender, full well he knew that he was paining her.

The girl's face was buried in the pillows. She wished very much to plead with him, but her voice was uncontrollable. Despite her effort at self-control, tears came to her eyes, and in a moment she was crying softly, yet heart-brokenly. The sound of her low sobs moved Maitland as nothing else could have done. It was the first time he had known her to weep. She tried to control herself, and finally managed to do so; but it was a very tearful voice which reproachfully addressed Max.

"I cannot do without you," it said, sadly, "and you can dispense with me."

Of course it was manifestly unjust, but Naomi had resolved to win her point by foul means if fair methods failed. For the nonce she had turned Jesuit, and was convinced that the end in this case justified the means. Max was greatly disturbed, his sweetheart was not usually so unreasonable. What could he say to reconcile her to the course of action which he during the night hours had mapped out? As he debated with himself a very persuasive little hand took possession of his, and a soft, coaxing voice increased his perplexity.

"Max," Naomi whispered, "you must give me the right to take care of you. In God's sight we are man and wife now, and have been ever since we plighted our troth. If you send me away it will break my heart."

"But, little woman, a worried voice answered, hesitatingly, "I will be a homeless log for some time, and you know that means not only that you would have to nurse me, but also that there would not be my salary to depend on."

Miss Binnie's face flushed crimson, but never once did she allow her eyes, eloquent with love, to stray from the man's worried face.

"Are you sure that you love me?" she questioned.

"Yes."

"Better than pride or any other silly thing?"

There was an almost imperceptible hesitation, then the answer came firmly, although it was accompanied by a questioning look—"Yes."

"I'm glad," with a relieved sigh. "Now, boy, just listen awhile, and I'll show you what a clever financier I am. You are a member of a Benefit Society, and the Accident Insurance will give you half salary for six months; moreover, Bob wants me to mother his two children while he goes to England and for this he agrees to pay me. If I calculate rightly, we'll have plenty to keep house on, and I can easily manage."

Surprise kept Max silent, his eyes became very wistful; if only this could come to pass! Although he had not admitted it to Naomi, the thought of enforced separation from her had been quite as hard to bear as that of his pain and helplessness. What a dear little woman she was; but ought he to take advantage of her great love? For his sake she was saddling herself with a grave responsibility.

The girl read aright his thoughts. "For my sake," she pleaded very urgently.

"Not so, little sweetheart," he corrected, gently; "but for both our sakes, I shall never forget your goodness to me."

"Nor I yours to me," cried Naomi in such glad tones that Mrs Leslie came hurrying in to see if by any means the doctor's verdict had proved to be mistaken.

"What has brightened you so?" she asked, wonderingly.

Maitland answered her out of the fullness of his heart. "Naomi insists on marrying me on the 20th. Is she wise or unwise?"

"Wise," was the astonishing answer and as the good dame whisked out of earshot she wiped a sympathetic tear away. Woman, thy name is mystery! Neither old age, prudential considerations, or any such thing has power to dry up within thee thy springs of compassionate tenderness.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TWINS.

Come to me, O, ye children!

And whisper in my ear,  
What the birds and winds are singing  
In your sunny atmosphere.

For what are our contrivings,  
And the wisdom of our books,  
When compared with your caresses,  
And the gladness of your looks?

—Longfellow.

Before his marriage Max Maitland had been unaware that he cared for children; but with the advent of the Miller twins there came to him a wide tolerance of the eager, noisy atmosphere with which the house was filled. The original reason for this tolerance was Maitland's keen desire to make his young wife's life as happy as possible. He knew that, did she discern impatience or annoyance on his part, she would worry. At first a continual struggle had been necessary to maintain cheerfulness and content; but by degrees the hardness of his natural heart was quite broken down, and he delighted in the bairns. Their innocent conversation and sweet little caresses interested and touched him. To their newly-discovered uncle the children unfolded their childish thoughts and fancies, thereby delighting and refreshing him. Much original speculation concerning the universe and its Maker was revealed by the innocent prattlings, and Max was entirely captivated by the general winsomeness of the youngsters. Within a fortnight after their arrival at the cottage the two had succeeded in twining themselves securely round his heartstrings.

That they had done so was a source of great thankfulness to Naomi. She had dreaded the coming of her sister's children, much more on Max's account than on her own. Now that her fears had disappeared, she moved briskly about her work, and was happy as the day was long. That Max should fully participate in her happiness was not to be expected, he was so helpless, so dependent; but he was much happier with Naomi as his wife than he would have been had she allowed him to carry out his intention of postponing their wedding.

Their honeymoon had been very different to the one which they had planned; but it had brought them nearer to each other than their first conception of that blissful experience could have done. It is Love's greatest desire to serve the beloved. Thus it was that Naomi was abundantly content; and Max also, for because of his trouble his wife had attained unto unexpected heights of unselfishness and compassion.

Were they happy? Yes. How could they be otherwise when each exclusively possessed the other? So curious and complex is our nature that this knowledge brought infinite content to the young couple.

Miller had sent the twins to his sister-in-law a fortnight after her marriage. From the time of their arrival she had been a very busy housewife, and oftentimes before the conclusion of her day's work she was weary, physically. But never did a discontented thought occur to her. Max was compensation for every ill.

The cottage contained four rooms and the attic. This last-mentioned space was too low to be of much use, and Naomi found herself cramped for room. The kitchen was small—too small almost for the twins to play in, but the sitting room, in which Max's couch stood, was commodious; and when the young housekeeper was engaged in the intricacies of dinner-devising and such like necessary occupations she bundled the youngsters into Max. It pleased him to be of some use, and his voice was enough to check the mischievous propensities of his young charges.

The other two rooms were of necessity bedchambers. It vexed Naomi to be unable to set apart a playroom, and many times her eyes rested longingly on a roomy shed that stood at the bottom of the garden. The key of this had not been given to Max, and Mr Wilks, the agent, with whom arrangements had been made, had expressly stated that it must not be disturbed. But young Mrs Maitland fairly longed to disturb it.

As children go, Eve and Roy were good, but they were children, and at times they were almost irrepressible. To make a

noise—a great noise—was their special delight, and although he never referred to it, Naomi knew that their uproars irritated and tried Max exceedingly. And yet it was hard to be continually scolding the bairns. If only the shed could be made into a playhouse!

One evening after the children were in bed, Naomi opened her heart to Max on this subject, and asked his advice. He looked thoughtful. "You could ask Wilks about it," he answered, quietly; "but I'm afraid that he is powerless in the matter. It is Mr Holloway's one stipulation that the shed remain closed."

"But," argued the girl, rebelliously, "there is no sense in that, and we would be so much better off with a playhouse for the youngsters. The blinds are drawn tightly down over the one window, and I cannot make out whether the shed contains anything or not."

"Suppose I write to Holloway, and address it to Wilks and Co.," suggested Max.

Naomi shook her head decidedly. "We would only meet with a polite refusal. Perhaps some day I'll take courage and go and plead my own case."

The man looked admiringly at the sweet little face framed in dark brown locks. "Little woman mine, you would succeed," he assured her. And then the conversation drifted into the old sweet channel of youthful ideals and love undefiled, and again the two were in the Garden of Eden. But Naomi remembered her half-formed intention of bearding the lion in his den, and a few days later she put it into execution. It happened in this wise. The weather was wet and cold, and in consequence the twins were more than usually trying. Max's weary face vexed Naomi, and recalled her previous thoughts concerning the shed.

"I'm going into town," she stated. "There are a few messages to do. Do you think you could keep these young savages in order until I come back?"

"Most certainly I do," answered Max quickly; "but the day is so miserable. Need you go?"

"The cupboard is bare," was the evasive

answer, "and my chickens are hungry; aren't you, bairns?"

"Not very," answered Roy, gravely. "Besides, the man brought loaves like Aunt Hannah used to make."

His questioner laughed. "I think I'll risk the weather," she said, gaily, "and when I come back you'll be glad because of what I bring with me, notwithstanding the fact that we've plenty of bread."

Max looked closely at her, and noted the bright, resolute expression in her eyes. "What are you going to do?" he asked, curiously.

"Get you some medicine," she answered laughingly, and then ran away to don outdoor attire. In a few moments she was back again, a trim, sweet little brown figure.

"Good-bye, bairns all," she called lightly. "If Bluebeard does not demolish me I'll have something very delicious for tea."

Eve looked wonderingly after her, and then smuggled closer into her uncle. He raised his arm—the power of his limbs was being gradually but surely restored to him—and drew her up on to the couch.

"Where has auntie gone?" she asked, solemnly.

"Down town," he answered, and added, a little crossly, "she'll get wet."

"Yes," very gravely; and then after a thoughtful pause, "If Roy were big like you he could go. Why don't you get wet instead of auntie?"

The man's brow contracted. The innocent question had opened the old wound. It was very difficult to reconcile himself to necessity and to patiently be useless, while Naomi bore the brunt of everything disagreeable. But Eve required an answer.

"I cannot walk just now," he told her quietly.

She stared at him. "Can't you chop wood either?" she queried.

"No."

"Would you like to?"

"Yes."

Here Roy interjected. "Auntie can't do it well. She leans up against the wall every time she cuts a bit, and breathes in such a funny way."

Max groaned in spirit. Naomi was a

frail little woman, not very hardy, and he knew that unwonted exertion tried her to some extent, although her indomitable spirit never allowed her to confess. Moreover, he remembered that before their marriage she had jestingly enumerated his duties. Her laughing words came back to him.

"When we are playing house, Max, you will be chief woodcutter and fire-kindler, and I'll be housekeeper, which office covers a multitude of duties."

He sighed, and Eve, looking up, caught a glimpse of his pain. Her chubby little arms twined themselves around his neck, and her soft cheek was pressed to his.

"Poor uncle," she cooed, softly; "Eve loves you."

But Roy's curiosity was not satisfied. "Do your legs hurt?" he asked.

"No," answered the man; "it is my back." And then he tried to explain to them the reason of his inactivity. Both listened with wide-open eyes.

"Did God make the trains smash?" asked Roy, in awestricken accents.

Max smiled grimly. "Yes," he answered, bitterly.

Eve noted the bitterness, and her sensitive little soul was shocked by his unwillingness to submit. Not so her brother. After Max's answer that young rebel straightened himself up. "Then I hate God," he said.

Eve was horrified. "Roy, you naughty boy!" she cried. "God is good; isn't he Uncle Max?"

And Uncle Max answered, "Yes," in a very gentle voice, for the child's faith had touched his heart and dispelled his unbelief. Eve was satisfied. She stole away from him, back to her deserted play. Max picked up a paper which lay, in company with many others, upon a small table at the side of the couch, and speedily became interested in its contents.

Presently he stopped reading, and pondered over that which he had read. New Zealand was in the throes of a great struggle—the struggle between License and No-license parties—and the current literature was full of references to and opinions concerning this warfare. On the one side, the party, commonly called the Prohibition-



ists, sought to influence the people to vote against the granting of licenses for the public sale of intoxicating liquors; and on the other, the "Trade" and its supporters strained every nerve to oppose the working of their foe.

The progress of reform is commonly considered a very slow one, but in this case it had not proved so. The mighty barrier which had been raised between the attaining of righteousness and the people by the passing of that unjust bill in 1893, which made it necessary that a three-fifths majority be obtained before No-license could be carried in any district, had been approached and almost sundered many times. Indeed, in a few cases, it had been brought to nought, and in some electorates licensed hotels no longer existed.

The matter at issue between the "fanatics" (?) and the worshippers of Mammon was one which very closely and very seriously affected the people. But Max Maitland's lines had been cast in pleasant places, and hitherto he had not realised the greatness of the stake. Consequently, he had not taken sides in the bloodless but strenuous battle which raged around him. But during his captivity he had come to think about many of life's riddles. And his reading had revealed to him much of the pain and heartbreaking pathos of the lives of those whom the world counts weak. Curiously enough, it was to the drunkard that his pity went most easily. He thought of the jovial, good fellows tempted beyond their powers of resistance by the custom of "shouting," and became resentful because of their lost manhood. "The might-have-beens," he reflected, and, reflecting, resolved that henceforth he would do his utmost to destroy the public snares which lured so many to their undoing.

Max was awakened from his reverie by Eve's hand upon his arm. "Where is auntie?" the child said, dismally; "it is getting dark."

And so it was. The short winter day was drawing to its close, and Naomi had not returned.

## CHAPTER V.

### MR. HOLLOWAY.

And, falling on my weary brain  
Like a fast-falling shower,  
The dreams of youth came back again,  
Low lispsings of the summer rain,  
Dropping on the ripened grain,  
As once upon the flowers.

—Longfellow.

But in the meantime where was Naomi? Immediately upon leaving the cottage she had caught a car, which speedily carried her into the business part of the town. Being an observant young woman, she had no difficulty in finding the office occupied by Wilks and Co., but once within the shabby little anteroom disturbing doubts as to the success of her mission assailed her. Her surroundings were so business-like; perhaps—and, indeed, probably—to the agents and to the owner of her little home sentiment was an unknown quality.

She had been waiting some five or ten minutes, when the inner door opened, and Mr Wilks, accompanied by another gentleman, appeared. The stranger was speaking, and Naomi distinctly caught his words.

"Yes," he was saying, "give them a month's notice. I have decided to pull down the old place and build a commodious, modern house. Gladstone street is decidedly aristocratic at the present time, and the house I am thinking of would let to advantage."

"It would, indeed," returned Wilks. "Your decision is a wise one." And then he noticed Naomi. Her eyes were fixed in startled amazement upon the first speaker. Surely these two were going to turn her out of The Nest.

"Are you Mr Holloway?" she asked, quickly.

"I have that doubtful honour," he answered, politely, and then astonishment was apparent on his face also as he recognised the girl. She it was who had so interested him on a previous occasion. But Naomi did not recognise him as the man who had been her fellow-passenger on that awful night journey from Fulton to Dunedin. Her thoughts were painfully intent on the present.

"I am your tenant," she continued, bravely, although quite conscious that Mr Wilks was unmistakably frowning at her, "and I hope that you will not turn us out of the cottage."

"Why—what!" gasped Wilks. "Mrs Maitland, you are very unbusiness-like."

"Mrs Maitland!" repeated Mr Holloway, softly. "So the child is married."

Here the respectable man of business looked as he felt scandalised at the irrelevancy of his client's remark. He turned to the young woman, and spoke with considerable dignity.

"My dear lady," he exclaimed, "Mr Holloway has instructed me in reference to the cottage you are now renting. If you will step into my office we need not detain him any longer."

Holloway turned quickly on the agent. Perhaps Naomi's confused colour and troubled eyes influenced him. "I have changed my mind," he stated, sharply. "Just leave matters relating to the cottage as they were before our interview."

"Thank you," the girl cried gratefully. "Now I am encouraged to voice my next petition."

At this juncture the crestfallen Wilks made it obvious that he desired to learn her object in calling at his office, and Naomi continued, "I called here in order to discover Mr Holloway's address."

"That I shall have great pleasure in making known to you," returned that gentleman, and bidding the agent good-afternoon, he led the way out of the office. Naomi followed, her well-set, little head held more proudly than usual, and her eyes very bright and excited-looking. It was raining—pouring, in fact. Holloway held his gigantic umbrella over his companion, and looked down at her.

"You wished to see me in reference to business?" he suggested.

"Yes," doubtfully, "but the weather is so dreadful, and my story is rather a long one."

The man smiled. "What did you intend doing after you discovered my address?" he asked.

"I intended to go to it, and then to plead my case," was the prompt answer.

"Very well," was the cool response. Just fulfil your intentions. We'll catch a car, and in a few minutes will be comfortably escorted in my rooms.

Before the girl fully realised the situation they were in a car, and about five minutes later were entering an hotel.

"I take up my abode here when I favour Dunedin with a visit," Holloway explained in answer to Naomi's curious glance. "At present I am taking you to my private sitting room."

As he spoke he opened a door, and ushered his visitor into a bachelor's den. By no other name could it be called. The floor was covered by a dark green carpet, relieved here and there by a brighter-coloured rug. In the centre stood a round table, the surface of which was almost covered with a litter, in which papers, books, pipes, and cigars mingled oddly. A comfortable-looking couch and several easy-chairs completed the furnishings. Woman-like, Naomi noted all these details as she sank into the cosy chair which the man had drawn forward for her.

"Thank you," she murmured. "I'm afraid I've put you to considerable trouble."

"You have not," he asserted. "But wait until I have put the fire into good humour, and then we'll talk business."

He stirred up the smouldering embers, added fresh fuel, and then drew a chair, and sat down opposite the girl.

"Now," he said, encouragingly, "it is more cosy, and we can talk at ease."

Naomi was not quite sure of this latter fact. Already she had received one favour from this man's hands, and her independent spirit revolted at the thought of craving another. If Holloway discerned her difficulty, he did not help her; instead, he increased her embarrassment by studying her keenly. But it was not of the present he was thinking. His thoughts had wandered backwards over the bridge of years, and were rioting among the golden-hued visions of youth—his lost youth. Of this Mrs Maitland was not aware, and, being afraid of increasing her indebtedness to him by undue loitering, she hurriedly opened her campaign.

"I wished to see you in order to ask per-

mission to use the shed at the bottom of our garden," she commenced, bravely. At the mention of shed her companion started, and was once more the collected business man, and not a dreamer of dreams. He frowned a little, and before he could frame a reply Naomi answered his expression of displeasure.

"I know," she cried, quickly, "that I am already indebted to you, but this further favour that I am asking means so much to us."

"Why did not your husband seek me out?" Holloway asked, sternly. "It surely was his place to arrange business details."

The brown eyes flashed, and every trace of nervousness vanished from the girl's manner. "My husband is at present confined to the house," a cold, self-possessed voice answered. "But if you prefer to discuss the matter with him he will write a letter to you." Naomi's hot temper was unmistakably getting the better of her, when the remembrance of Holloway's recent kindness brought her back to reason. "I beg your pardon," she said, quietly, "but you seemed to blame Max. Perhaps I had better explain." And she did so, simply but effectively, for before the narrative was concluded the listener was wonderfully moved.

"You married him in order to nurse him?" he asked, a strange look in his eyes.

"I married him in order to please myself," she answered, softly.

"What folly it was," was the apparently severe comment, but the man's face was softened. "What a child you were to take up such responsibilities! And now you have two children on your hands?"

"I have" (calmly), "but I do not regret my marriage."

"Indeed," grimly. "Does this precious husband of yours?"

"That is a question which you had better not put to me," returned the young wife, and her merry laugh rippled out. It was so sincerely amused that the man's joined it, and they laughed in concert; but only for an instant did mirth prevail. Naomi remembered her errand, and turned a grave face to her companion.

"Now that you know the circumstances are you unwilling to grant me the use of the shed?" she asked, soberly.

A troubled, reminiscent look appeared in Holloway's eyes. Again he subjected the girl to the keen scrutiny which had made her uncomfortable at the commencement of their interview.

"Let me tell you a story," he said, suddenly. "You have told me yours, and now I will tell you mine, and if you still wish to have the shed you may do so. Do you care to listen?"

Naomi eagerly answered in the affirmative. She was interested in this man with the keen eyes and brusque manner.

Holloway fixed his eyes on the flames, and commenced:

"Thirty years ago there lived two people—a girl dark and pretty, possessed of very good qualities but one, and a young fellow whose one redeeming feature was his great love for the girl. Very probably he deserved the blows which Fate was constantly meting out to him at all events, he was an unfortunate boy, and also, as this story will prove, an unfortunate man. But for a brief period he considered himself the most fortunate of mortals, and that was when the girl was his promised wife. He was a rough-looking lad, a farmer's son; she was fresh and sweet—a farmer's daughter. Their fathers' farms adjoined, and very often these two young people would steal along the fields in the twilight, and would confide to each other their deepest and best thoughts. Ah! in those days life appeared very beautiful to the uncouth country lad. It was his first, and, as after events proved, last glimpse into paradise. A motherless lad, he had roughed it from childhood's days; the sweetness of a woman's love had never been lavished upon him before. He lived in the seventh heaven, and thought that at last he had come into his kingdom.

"The days passed quickly and joyously. He had youth and love. Because of the last possession the first had marvellously increased in value. In all probability they had a long life to spend together. But the girl was cast on a finer mould, and she was not quite satisfied with the ideal life

he had planned. She loved him, of course, but she wished first of all to go away to a neighbouring town. An older sister lived there, and she had promised the country maid that every advantage which New Zealand could afford would be hers for a year if during that time she would make Dunedin her home. And the girl chose to take the offer. Country life, and, indeed, all life, 30 years ago was much rougher than it now is, and Ruth was weary of uncongenial work. 'Let me go for a year,' she pleaded, 'and then I'll come back and be your own little wife.'

'Of course, the man consented. He could not do otherwise with the beseeching brown eyes turned to his. But it wounded him to think that she cared so little. She went away, and by-and-bye there came a letter craving his forgiveness, but stating that farm life was now unendurable to her. Would he release her from her engagement, or would he go and live in Dunedin? He was in love, so he went to Dunedin and commenced to learn a trade. His father was annoyed at his course of action, and consequently refused to help him. But the young fool was in love, and he set his teeth hard, and slaved in order to make a home for the girl. He had about £20, which he had put by while working on the farm, and another £100 which his mother had left him. Presently he bought a piece of land. In those days it was cheap, and he had a cottage erected. It was a simple place, but he thought that in time he could better it, and never a thought entered his mind but that she also would be content. So he toiled on in secret, and presently when his cottage was completed and furnished in a rough fashion, he told her the wonderful secret. But her way of receiving the news chilled him to the heart. She trembled and faltered, and finally cried bitterly. And the man knew, even before her reluctant lips uttered the words, that they had made a mistake. He left her, and went back to the home which he had planned. With dreary eyes he surveyed the enclosure: it was all so ready for its occupants. He had planted shrubs and young trees; work had been pleasure because of his love for her. And

at the bottom of the garden he had, with his own hands, erected a shed. Carpentering was the trade which he had taken up. Who shall say what visions of happy children playing within visited him as he laboured?

'Ruth married the other man, and the country lad, after two years of Dunedin life, went back to the farm. His father took him in; but before he went he moved all the furniture from out of the cottage into the shed at the bottom of the garden. And there unto this day it remains.'

The narrator ceased, and looked at Naomi. This foolish young woman had tears in her eyes. 'What was the other man's name?' she asked, breathlessly.

'Binnie,' he answered.

'And my mother's name was Ruth,' gasped the girl, and then as the grey head opposite bowed in assent a wave of friendliness swept over her. She rose quickly and stood beside the man. Her hand found his and clasped it with warm firmness.

'Let us be friends,' she suggested, 'and perhaps I will be able to make up for the years which are past.'

'Thank you,' he answered, simply. To him her proposal was infinitely pleasing. Half shyly Naomi withdrew her hand, and returned to her seat. 'How did you know me?' she asked, curiously.

'You are very like what your mother was when I knew her,' he answered, dreamily, his eyes fixed almost yearningly on her face. 'And your voice is hers over again. Also I remembered that Naomi was a favourite name of hers. When you were travelling to Dunedin one night about six weeks ago I heard your aunt address you by your name.' This last sentence was added in answer to the girl's look of surprise at his knowledge concerning herself.

'Mrs Leslie is the sister whom my mother went to stay with,' she asserted. 'Did you not recognise her?'

He shook his head. 'You must remember that 28 years is a long time,' he answered, 'and she has changed very much.'

'Yes,' quietly, and then with keen interest, 'what happened to the man in your story after he went back to his farm?'

"He existed," was the listless answer. "Five years later he heard of her death, and knew that she left two children. Afterwards he never received any information concerning her family until six weeks ago."

"How dreadful," sighed young Mrs Maitland, her heart full of her own happiness. How dull and worthless life would be if anything should happen to Max, and yet this man, who was nearing his three score years and ten, had experienced a greater loss than she ever could, because, whatever happened, her husband's love was hers.

Holloway smiled faintly. "I had my dream, Naomi—for the sake of what might have been I will use perfect freedom with you and your name—and it was very sweet. Tell me about your early life."

"Father died two years after mother, and aunt took charge of us. She had moved to Invercargill, and was lonely. Her own husband had died before my mother. Grace married Robert Miller, and about six or eight months ago she died."

"And you have her children?"

"Yes," and then she added, "will you come and see them?"

"I will come to-morrow," he answered, almost happily, and as she rose to depart he shook hands warmly. "You have renewed my youth," he assured her, and the girl believed it. Not until she stood at her own door did she remember that her mission had not been accomplished.

Left alone, the man gazed soberly into the embers. He was stirred to the very depths of his being. Winsome, impulsive Naomi had revived old memories. Once more he walked the green fields, and inhaled with the joyousness of youth the sweet spring air.

"The heart was young in those days," he murmured, softly, "and oddly enough it has now lost the burden of the years. If only Naomi and her twins will take me in I shall be a happy man yet."

But even as he spoke he sighed, for a barrier separated him from the pure happiness which had once been within his reach. The taint of sordid business transactions was upon him; he had been a money-gainer, but in the hot pursuit of gold he had not always listened to the inward

monitor. In some odd fashion the thought of this marred his satisfaction. Naomi's face was so fresh and innocent.

"Perhaps I'll turn over a new leaf," he muttered, restlessly; "but to-morrow will help to decide."

And once more he became lost in thought. Memory was exercising her full power, and in her fragrant care the man was content to remain.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MR. HOLLOWAY'S VISIT.

The treasures of the deep are not so precious  
As are the conceal'd comforts of a man  
Lock'd up in woman's love.

—Middleton.

Next morning, as Naomi moved briskly about her household duties, her thoughts were full of the expected visitor. Max shared in her feelings, and awaited with considerable curiosity Mr Holloway's advent. But perhaps it was the twins to whom the morning passed most slowly. They were woefully conscious that the moments dragged drearily, and their childish minds were much vexed thereby. On the previous evening Naomi, in genuine dismay at the forgetfulness which had resulted in the total neglect of the shopping that she had intended doing, had informed her charges that on the morrow they would have an opportunity of duly inspecting and interrogating the innocent cause of her negligence. In consequence the youngsters were deeply curious and much excited. During their short life they had met but few strangers, and certainly never had they beheld a big, tall man such as their aunt described their expected visitor to be.

"Will he come early?" asked Roy plaintively, as he peeped into the kitchen. The weather was still very rough and cold, and the young housekeeper had relegated him to Max's sitting room. Naomi laughed rather crossly—her arms were covered with flour, she was in the midst of baking, and that, together with the necessary cooking, was occupying all her attention.

"You are a little humbug, Roy," she answered. "This is the fifth time you have

asked me that question. Go into Uncle Max or I'll lock you up by yourself in your bedroom."

"Are you very busy?" called Max, as the culprit disconsolately withdrew at this dire threat. "Poor little woman."

"It is all right," she returned. "The morning is a busy time, and this is baking day; but for all that I'll survive."

She left her bakeboard for an instant and stood on the doorway of the inner room. "See, this is my occupation."

Max laughed at the white arms extended toward him. "Poor little girl," he commiserated jestingly, and yet with an undertone of earnestness. "We bother you awfully, don't we?"

"No," quickly and with a happy glance; "and it is a very decided 'no,' only (hesitatingly) you know that sometimes one's nerves get out of order."

"Of course," understandingly, "and yesterday's interview with Mr Holloway tried you."

"It did a little," she admitted, "but in one way it made me glad. I feel that we have gained a friend. Oh, those scones!" as a burnt odour made its way into the room, and the flurried cook rushed to the rescue. A moment later she reappeared at the door, a shelf of brown, tempting-looking scones in her hands. These she held up with pardonable pride. "I'll beat Hannah soon," she exclaimed triumphantly, "These are only my third attempt."

"But then you are such a clever little housekeeper," replied Max. His idleness had made him an adept at compliments, at least, so his wife assured him. At this particular one she retreated to her own special domain retorting as she did so. "You are a young man of one idea, therefore argument would be useless." Nevertheless she was well pleased, as, indeed, any woman would have been, and as she bustled about there was a happy light in her eyes. These little positive sentences of Max's made her days so much happier and brighter. Wifehood was a very precious possession to her. As for Max, he mused contentedly concerning his happiness.

"How different everything is to what I pictured it in boyhood. Then I thought

that in the future I would do some wonderful deed and set the world talking. How well I remember the dream of being a great author, which came to me early in my teens," he murmured, and a sigh stole into the air. Once long ago he had thought much of this pretty fancy, but his own limitations had compelled him to give it up. "Bah," he continued more briskly, "the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, but I never guessed at anything half as pure and sweet as Naomi's love."

"What is Uncle Max saying?" asked Roy of Eve in an awed whisper, and Eve stole over to the man. "What is it," she asked, wonderingly. The sight of her innocent, perplexed face roused Max. He laughed a little. "Poor wee mite," he answered; "you look frightened. I was only talking to myself."

At this explanation the child smiled. "Did you fink someone was here?" she asked.

"Think," corrected Roy in a superior manner. "You said fink." It is impossible to convey an adequate conception of the scorn with which the last word was repeated. It troubled Eve, and made her indignant.

"I said fink," she stated, defiantly.

Max controlled his features. "Roy, you must not tease Eve. I like the way she speaks."

"But it is wrong," argued the boy, and Eve looked ready to cry.

"It is pretty," asserted his uncle. "No, dearie, I did not think that anyone was with me; but I was having an interview with my old self." Both children looked grave, and, foreseeing endless questions, Max hurriedly sent them back to their play.

At length the long morning was past. Dinner was over, and everything straightened by 2 o'clock. Naomi donned a black skirt and a cream serge blouse—both she and Max had a liking for cream,—and as she sat down beside him she read admiration in his eyes.

"Do you know," he laughed, "that married life agrees with you?"

"Does it?" a little wearily. "Nevertheless, to-day I am a little tired."

"Are you?" regretfully. "Never mind, just stay here and rest awhile."

"That is my intention," she answered, with infinite content, and her fingers stole caressingly through the close-cropped hair. "Talk to me, Max."

"Certainly. You have but to command, and it shall be accomplished, that is, as far as my limited powers will permit me to do your will."

"Hush," she commanded now, as she detected the underlying bitterness and her hand touched his lips firmly. "You have made me the happiest woman in the British Empire."

He took her fingers away, and exclaimed in mock consternation, "You limit your happiness!"

"I do not," she contradicted flatly, "for I am of the opinion that in all other lands women enjoy a smaller mead of happiness than they do in England or in any of her possessions."

"True," was the answer, and then his thoughts turned to the resolution which he had taken on the previous afternoon, and he added gravely, "but I am afraid that there are many miserable women in the British Empire."

"What makes you say that?" she asked wonderingly, for his sudden change from gay to grave bewildered her.

In answer he told her all that was in his heart concerning the matter of license or no-license, and in her turn she became a convert. "We have been unwittingly selfish in this matter," he concluded; "but in the days to come we'll do better, won't we, dearie?"

"Yes," she returned thoughtfully, and then silence brooded over them, and the girl's heart went out to suffering humanity. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn," she quoted softly, "and yet I don't think that all hotelkeepers are bad. Do you, Max?"

He smiled at the childishness of the question, nevertheless his answer was grave enough. "No," very deliberately, "I am quite sure that they are not, but I'm afraid that they are all blinded by gold dust."

For some time longer the two discussed

the matter, and then Naomi turned the subject. "Don't talk any more about it," she pleaded. "It makes me sad. Let us think of brighter things. I am quite used up with my own share of the world's burdens to-day." A smile and a soft caress robbed the words of the sting which otherwise they might have possessed. Max fell in with her mood immediately.

"Of course you are," he answered, contritely. "I quite forgot that this was baking day."

And then the two wandered away into the realms of fancy. Naomi had just concluded a mirthful description of the honeymoon which they were to enjoy in a year's time when the bairns were back at Briarwood farm and Max was quite better. And Max was stating in very contented tones that they would live happily every afterward, when a loud knock resounded through the house.

Eve rushed in from the kitchen, her blue eyes dilated with excitement. "Is it Bluebeard," she asked breathlessly.

"Yes," answered Naomi, mischievously. "It's the kind Bluebeard who did not demolish me. Run away, chicks, until I call you." She hustled the children back into the kitchen, and then very sedately proceeded to answer the summons. Very warmly she greeted her visitor; few had been privileged to see her brown eyes glow in welcome as they did when she shook hands with her mother's old friend. But her heart had been touched by his story, and his loneliness appealed very powerfully to her. "I am glad to welcome you here," she answered him as she ushered him in, "and so will Max be. This is Mr Holloway, Max."

This was all the introduction which the two received. The tall, grey-haired man shook hands cordially with the invalid, and then suffered his hostess to bear his dripping overcoat into the kitchen. Here the twins welcomed her, and were manifestly anxious to be permitted to enter the sitting room. Rightly divining that their presence would do much to prevent even temporary embarrassment, Naomi took them back with her.

"These are Grace's children," she said, simply.

Roy shook hands with an amusing assumption of manliness, he was such a little mite beside the broad-shouldered visitor. Eve's greeting was more gracious. The friendly look in the keen eyes bent upon her was very encouraging, and she raised her face for a kiss.

That the voluntary action pleased the recipient was evident. He picked up the child and deposited her on one knee. "It would even matters," he suggested to Roy, "if you would ride on the other." But that young gentleman was on his dignity.

"No thanks," he answered politely, but very decidedly, and he moved to Max's side. His defiant attitude amused Naomi. "What is the matter?" she asked quickly.

"I don't like Bluebeard," Roy asserted staunchly, steadily keeping his eyes on that individual in the meantime. Guiltily his aunt realised that the child had accepted Mr Holloway as the original Bluebeard, and was not prepared to have any dealings with such a notorious villian. A few words of explanation sufficed to enlighten the guest. He was amused, and in his turn undertook to make everything clear to the young stickler for righteousness. By the time his task was accomplished everyone was at ease, and when, half an hour later, Naomi banished the twins to the kitchen, there was no lack of conversation in the sitting room. Mr Holloway stayed until late in the evening. He and Max found many themes of common interest, and each entertained the other. The young wife also was interested in the conversation, although for the most part she was content to be a silent listener. Holloway told of his rough, here-to-day and away-to-morrow life, told of sharp business dealings, of land bought one year for a mere song and sold the next for considerably more. It was an exciting narrative of a busy life, and as Max listened he was entranced.

"I always wished for an open-air life," he cried enthusiastically, "but (with a grimace) from my youth up I have been tied to a desk."

Holloway bent on him a quizzical glance. "An open-air life is all very well," he commented, "but I would not advise you to be a dealer and a maker of bargains. It does not pay."

Max looked wonderingly at him. "You are jesting," he exclaimed, for but a moment previously his visitor had spoken of a smart business transaction which resulted in 200 per cent. gain.

"Of course," was the impatient answer. "It pays as far as filthy lucre is concerned, but (with a dreary smile) one's conscience sometimes suffers."

At this juncture Naomi looked up. "You are right in saying that it does not pay," she said, simply. "It is a bad bargain."

"Little Puritan, you are quite correct," he acquiesced; "but, at all events a farmer's life may be a good God-fearing one. Had things turned out differently I would have been content to be a tiller of the soil until the day of my death." A sigh concluded this sentence, and the girl gave him a sympathetic glance.

After seeing their visitor away Naomi returned to Max—the twins had been in bed for three hours. She was radiant. "Dear," she cried gleefully, "I believe we'll be able to shake all the morbidness out of him. As he was going away he actually mentioned the shed, and told me to have patience for a week, and that then he would give me a definite answer."

"You'll get your own way," her husband laughed, and added: "Were he a younger man I might be jealous. His eyes followed your every movement, and there was such a hungry expression on them that I was almost moved to offer him half of you."

"You are ridiculous," the girl answered lightly, but she soon became serious. "I do like Mr Holloway," she continued, "and if he likes to do so he may occupy a very warm corner in my heart. I am sorry for him. You don't object?"

The question was jestingly asked in order to cover much real feeling. The happy young wife felt a passion of tender pity for the man whom her mother had exiled from home and family ties.

"Object!" echoed Max. "Not I, although you'll have to enlarge your heart, for I simply will not be crowded out."

He also spoke lightly for the purpose of disguising deeper feeling. Some words of Dickens had occurred to him. "No man ever really loved a woman, lost her, and knew her with a blameless though an un"



changed mind when she was a wife and mother; but her children had a strange sympathy with him, an instinctive delicacy of pity for him." There was something in Naomi's voice which recalled the lines and made him realise their truth.

"As if you could be," reproachfully, "but (and her voice quivered pitifully) he has missed so much of the wayside brightness of life. I would like to compensate him."

Max looked kindly into the grave, wistful face turned to him for encouragement. "Very well, Naomi, do your best," he answered, and added: "He deserves something at our hands."

## CHAPTER VII. THE SHED.

O we live, O we live—  
And this life that we receive  
Is a gloomy thing and brief,  
Which consummated in grief,  
Leaveth ashes for all gain,  
Is it not all in vain?

—Mrs Browning.

A week has passed, and, true to his word, Mr Holloway is back at The Nest. He and Naomi were standing outside the shed, and in her hand the girl held a key. She inserted it in the lock, and bravely endeavoured to turn it, but disuse had made the lock stiff, and, pantingly, she turned to her companion. Without a word he exerted his great strength, and succeeded in opening the door.

"You have a glance round," he said curtly, "and then run back to the cottage. Everything will be very dusty, but I'll fix things up if you'll lend me a soft hand broom."

Naomi made no answer; already she was within the shed. As Holloway had stated, everything was covered with dust, but she could see that the little room in which she stood was packed with furniture. There was an inner chamber, and obeying a strong impulse the girl stepped over to it. What she there saw was a solitary picture. The glass which protected it was thick with dust. Something moved her to brush a little of it off, and then was revealed a face startlingly like her own. For an instant she looked at it, and her eyes filled. She brushed away the

drops and returned to Holloway. He was standing where she had left him, his face almost rigid in its intensity of feeling. Naomi brushed hastily past him, murmuring something about getting a duster. He did not heed her, but as she entered the cottage she saw him open the shed door and go in. It was half an hour before she ventured back with the soft dusting broom, and even then she went reluctantly and softly, as though afraid of intruding. He was not in the outer room, and with noiseless steps she stole to the doorway which divided the two compartments. She held her breath. Holloway had carefully wiped the dust off the pictured face, and was now gazing upon it. So absorbed was he that he did not notice that other face which pityingly looked in at him.

"Ruth," the girl heard him murmur; "my own little Ruth." Then he leaned against the wall and buried his face in his hands. Again the listener heard her mother's name, but this time the voice which uttered it expressed tearless agony. It was more than Naomi could bear. She quietly dropped her brush and fled to the cottage, where she surprised Max by bursting into tears.

"It is so dreadful," she murmured, heart-brokenly; "he has not the least consolation. You see, dear, if you were taken from me I would still have the consciousness that we were one, and that not even death could sever us; but this is infinitely worse. He knows that he is the outsider; my mother was mated to my father, and he is out in the cold."

Max smiled very tenderly at this outburst. "You must not worry, little woman," he reasoned; "you cannot alter things."

But Naomi refused to be comforted. "It is the thought of so much wasted love that hurts me," she said. "Somehow, I feel as if it could not be. I have a strange fancy that when I am thinking of Mr Holloway then mother is pleased with me." She broke off suddenly for Max was regarding her with surprise.

"I always thought you very practical," he explained. "This is the first visionary talk that you have indulged in."

"I know," returned the girl, flushing; "but this matter has taken a powerful hold on me."

In the meantime Richard Holloway was experiencing the bitterest hour of his life. He had thought himself used to heart-loneliness and inward desolation, but never before had "what might have been" gripped him with such relentless force.

This life of ours is a wild Æolian harp of many a joyous strain,  
But under them all there runs a perpetual wail, as of souls in pain.

was a thought which throbbed through his whole being with a mournful, convincing cadence that threatened to break the barriers of his fortitude. It seemed but yesterday that he threw down his tools and gleefully realised that the cottage and all its outbuildings were complete. Oh, the pleasant dream of a home which had been his, and yet throughout 30 long years he had not attained to it. He did not blame Ruth. She could not help it, he reasoned. The other man had fascinated her, and the poor country boy had been forgotten. Nevertheless, he thought regretfully, the awkward country boy would have made her happier than rumour credited the London gentleman with having done.

"Poor, wee Ruthie," he said tenderly as he picked up Naomi's broom and commenced his work. He hesitated for an instant, and then took up the picture and carefully carried it into Max's sitting room. Naomi understood his errand before words proclaimed it, and her ready acceptance and cordial thanks made his task of presentation easier.

"Thank you," she said softly; "I have not any other photograph of my mother."

Holloway did not waste many words. He was too full of the past for that, but as he retraced his way to the shed a more hopeful expression was in his eyes. "Perhaps Naomi will help me to live down the 'perpetual pain,'" he thought. This time he went to work immediately, commencing by pushing up the windows and opening the doors to their widest extent. And in truth fresh air became very necessary before his work had proceeded far. Dust enveloped everything, and as he moved the various articles the man was almost

smothered. However, he persevered, and as twilight stole over the land congratulated himself upon having made a clearance in the outer room. He looked into the cottage for a moment to acquaint its inmates of this fact, but refused Naomi's invitation to tea. She was a little disappointed, but as she read the story of the afternoon's severe conflict in his eyes she discerned that he was moody, and desired only his own company.

Poor Holloway! Every piece of furniture which he handled had torn open afresh the old wound, and as he strode away from the cottage life seemed very unattractive, and during the long evening hours ghosts of his past happiness haunted him. He had taken his sore heart to the solitude of his own den, but he could not rest, and about 10 o'clock he put on a cap and stole forth into the night. He walked quickly along, and was for a time unconscious of his whereabouts. A knowledge of these was brought to him by the sudden opening of a door, which revealed a rudely-furnished room occupied by two or three rough-looking men. A quick glance over his surroundings convinced Holloway that he was in Walker street, and therefore in a most undesirable locality. Having little inclination to be bothered by roughs of any description he was making his way to purer quarters when his attention was attracted by a shadowy something crouching against the wall. He stopped short in order to make investigations, and the figure straightened itself up and confronted him with wide-open, defiant eyes. It was a slip of a girl; so much was discernible in the moonlight.

"What are you doing here by yourself?" Holloway asked, somewhat harshly. The note of condemnation encouraged the girl; it was evident that she had feared something worse than censure. She took in her questioner's character at a glance, and defiance left her.

"Dad put me out," she explained contemptuously; "he was drunk."

Here Holloway winced. "He is a fool to waste good liquor," he answered curtly. "Well, what are you going to do?"

"Wait until he goes to sleep and then dodge in," the girl told him; but her

eyes glittered angrily, and she burst forth, "He is a fool to waste a good man by drinking the cursed stuff."

Holloway smiled drily. "You had better come with me," he said, "and I'll see that you get a decent room to sleep in."

The girl eyed him doubtfully, and then, reassured by the honest purpose which his eyes betrayed, and knowing that her present position was dangerous in the extreme, she thanked him, and added with more softness in her manner than she had before shown, "I am going to a place to-morrow, and I want to keep respectable."

Accompanied by his foundling the man made his way back to the hotel. Here he was received with some amazement, but after giving orders about the girl's room he immediately retired to his den. Lizzie Deane—that was the street waif's name—looked oddly after him.

"He's a good sort," she muttered. "All the same, he's not a religious cove by the cut of him."

And then she also made her way to the chamber of refuge which had been provided for her.

In the meantime Holloway was smiling over the little adventure which had befallen him. It was the first time that he had acted the good Samaritan in such a bare-faced fashion. "Anyway," he reflected—and the reflection pleased him—"it would please Naomi." But the next moment sterner thoughts occupied his attention. "Bah!" he muttered, "the man was a fool to make a beast of himself. The liquor is all right: it is the men who spoil it."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ELLICE.

Till the o'er burdened heart so long  
Imprisoned in itself, found vent  
And voice in one impassioned song  
Of inconsolable lament.

—Longfellow.

Eve rushed in quickly; she and Roy had been playing outside.

"Uncle Max," she cried in excited tones, "here is Cousin Ellice."

Before the bewildered man could realise the child's meaning a tall, graceful woman

appeared in the kitchen. She looked a little vexed, and immediately explained her intrusion.

"My little cousins brought me to the back door," she commenced, "and would have me enter without ceremony."

"Come in," Max invited cordially. "Naomi has spoken of you. You are Miss M'Pherson?" And as the unexpected visitor made her way into the sitting room he despatched Roy to the shed for Naomi. That individual immediately put in an appearance, and speedily made Robert Miller's cousin welcome.

"Are you in Dunedin for any length of time?" she queried with genuine interest, and was much pleased with the answer given.

"In all probability I will be in Dunedin for years," Ellice told her with a ring of gladness in her tones. "I have entered the Hospital as a probationer, and intend to make nursing my life-work."

Naomi stared in astonishment. "I thought that you were settled at Fulton," she exclaimed. "How surprised Robert will be when he comes home."

The grey eyes looked steadily into the amazed brown ones, although the fair skin became tinted with colour.

"It will be a surprise," the older woman admitted; "but for years I have wished to take the step which it has at last been my good fortune to take."

"I am very glad for your sake," sincerely; "but I was unaware that you had cherished such a project."

Then Mrs Maitland bore her guest away to the pretty little bedroom. "Where are you staying?" she asked.

"At the Excelsior Hotel—M'Kenzie's. What a sweet little home you have made!"

The young housekeeper blushed with pleasure. She had few visitors, and so far only her husband's eyes had glowed with appreciation of her little womanly touches. "I am glad you like it," she confessed as naively as a child. "You see, we had not much, but we did the best we could."

"And that was a very good 'best,'" Ellice commented sincerely, as she noted the perfect harmony of tints and shades

which gave a restfulness to the room. "The wall paper is exquisite."

"Yes," contentedly, "that was our one extravagance. Max and I both abhorred the one which previously adorned the walls, and in consequence he bought this and hung it himself; but that was before his accident." A shadow fell over the young face as she uttered the last words. The other woman noticed it, and hastened to administer comfort.

"How well your husband looks," she said brightly. "And he has recovered the power of his arms. He gripped my hand in such a hearty fashion that I almost begged for mercy. It is now almost three months since the accident occurred; before long he will be ordering you about. Make the most of your reign, Naomi. At present it is, 'Husbands obey your wives,' but in a very little while it will be, 'Wives obey your husbands.'"

At this mischievous prophecy Naomi's face cleared, as Ellice had meant it to. "So I tell Max," she cried merrily, and added with a deeper note of feeling, "And you can't imagine how delighted I will be to abdicate in favour of the new ruler."

Ellice having removed her "things" and smoothed her hair the two re-entered the sitting room. As they did so Max hastily secreted scraps of paper upon which he had been scribbling.

"I think I heard you taking my name in vain," he said lightly. "Just imagine that you are on the confession box, and make a clean breast of everything."

"Well," his wife answered demurely, "Ellice has been assuring me that in a very little time you will be unmanageable."

"I most sincerely hope that such will be the case," he retorted briskly. "I long to assert that I am the head of the house."

"I'm afraid that in the days to come you'll need a peacemaker," Ellice remarked, and then frivolity was abandoned and the conversation became earnest.

"Old Hannah looks after my brother very thoroughly," the visitor informed them. "He says that she is a capital housekeeper, but I'm afraid that the old dame is not content. Although she is loath to confess it she misses the twins."

And the man gravely answered, "I be-

lieve that when we send them back to Briarwood Farm we'll miss them dreadfully at first. They are dear little youngsters."

"Yes," assented Ellice; "but they are dreadfully wearing." Involuntarily she glanced at Naomi's face. Seen in repose it wore a worried expression, and looked thinner than of yore. Max noticed the quick glance, and sighed.

"Yes," he said regretfully; "they do worry and tease."

But Naomi laughed. "Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "The bairns keep us from becoming dull, although I'm afraid Max spoils them."

The invalid defended himself bravely. "Indeed I do not," he retorted; "Naomi is the culprit."

"Well," very amicably, "perhaps we are both at fault to some extent; but it is Mr Holloway who is the most to blame."

"Here is that individual," said a deep voice, and a tall man stepped in at the open window. "What am I responsible for?"

"The spoiling of the bairns," answered Max. "You see, we are giving an account of ourselves to their other guardian. This is Miss McPherson, Miller's cousin, Mr Holloway."

Holloway bowed gravely and surveyed the young lady with interest—a fine figure and a pleasant face, but not a patch on our Naomi," was his inward comment, and then he explained his visit. "I looked in to see if the man had fulfilled my instructions about the oilcloth," he said, looking at Mrs Maitland. Her eyes were eager, and her voice pleased as she answered quickly:

"You are too good, Mr Holloway. I have made such a cosy little place of the outer room, and the furniture which your note gave me permission to use helped me immensely. Thank you very much."

The man laughed. "That is nothing," he said; "but you have not lost any time. I intended to talk to your husband while you fixed things up down yonder."

"I am not quite finished," Naomi answered; "and if you'll stay here I'll take Ellice with me, and together we'll com-

plete my task—that is, if you care to come?" turning to Ellice.

"Certainly," she answered, and a moment later the two girls strolled down the path toward the shed. As they walked the younger explained matters to her companion, and found in her an interested listener.

"It is very hard for Mr Holloway," Ellice said thoughtfully; "very, very hard."

"It is, indeed," sympathetically, and then the two entered the shed. Once within its walls Naomi's tongue loosened concerning her mother's rejected lover to an even greater extent. The chairs standing about and the little table which occupied the centre of the room spoke eloquently to her of his loneliness, and made her tender heart long to devise some complete atonement.

"Once," she concluded, "I used to think that a man ought to love once, and only once, in his lifetime; but it would please me if Mr Holloway were to fall in love and marry."

Ellice sighed. "It is impossible, dear," she said sadly. "Love is not a matter of convenience. One loves, and that love always is, even although the heart is broken and the life is lonely."

Naomi looked quickly at her companion, and was struck by the deepness of her feelings. Tears stood in the grey eyes, and her lips were quivering.

"What is the matter?" she cried anxiously, and was amazed when, in answer, the fair head bowed itself on the table, and long convulsive sobs shook the slight frame. "Don't," she implored in such distressed tones that Ellice assayed to calm herself.

"Don't worry about me," she said; "I'll be all right in a minute or two."

And in five minutes she was her usual cheerful self, or would have been, had not the wistful trouble in Naomi's eyes asked an explanation.

"It is very silly of me," she said hurriedly; "but you will understand when I tell you that in some measure your friend's pain is mine. I am unfortunate enough to have given my love to one who will never return it."

"Oh," said Naomi piteously, "what a

cruel thing life is! But, perhaps," timidly, "you will find that the one you speak of is not indifferent."

Ellice smiled—a sad smile. "No, I am not mistaken. He can never love me as I love him. I hold your belief that a man, a true man, can only love once as a man should love the woman he makes his wife."

Young Mrs Maitland looked searchingly at the speaker, and found in her eyes the confirmation of a dreadful suspicion that had seized her. "Poor Ellice," she moaned, "I am so sorry, dear."

And then the two women wept in each other's arms, and as their tears mingled a cry of anguish escaped Robert Miller's cousin.

"Love is cruel," she cried heart-brokenly. "How can I live my lonely life?"

And from Naomi's lips fell compassionate words of womanly love. She was possessed of a sweet, unselfish nature, and the burthens which loaded her friends were a weight that her own shoulders bore constantly. But if she felt acutely, she also was able to give out of herself solace beyond that which a more even-tempered comforter could have given, and as Ellice was ministered unto the bitterness of the cup she was called upon to drink seemed diminished.

"You have been very good to me," she murmured, as with a spent look in her face she leaned back on a chair; "and in the days to come when I have learned that 'something there yet remains for me in this world, were it only to bear my sorrows like a man, and to aid those who need my assistance,' I'll remember it."

"To aid those in need is a splendid life-work," softly; "and you know, Ellice, the work which you are taking up is full of opportunities."

"Yes," thoughtfully, and then very brightly, "please don't imagine that I'm always pitying myself; indeed I don't often indulge in that doubtful luxury."

"Of course not," was the brisk answer, and then the two fell to work in such earnest that the room was in complete order when, half an hour later, they returned to the cottage, although in Ellice's eyes there lingered a shade of sadness.

Do the work that's nearest.  
Though it's dull at whiles,  
Helping, when we meet them,  
Lame dogs over stiles

whispered Naomi softly as she bustled to and fro preparing tea, and she mischievously pointed to the sitting room, wherein Mr Holloway and Max were. "Go and talk to them. Mr Holloway knows so few women, and I want you to know each other, because in the days to come you'll see much of one another—that is, if you come to see me as often as I hope you will."

Obediently Ellice obeyed the command.

## CHAPTER IX. TWO SURPRISES.

After all, the problem of life is not a very difficult one. Do what is right the best way you can, and wait to the end to know.—Charles Kingsley.

"Bring back a Witness." Max called after Naomi. She turned her hand on the door handle, and looked wonderingly at him.

"Why?" bluntly. "You never used to tell me to bring you one. Last Thursday and this are the only times that you have asked me. What is interesting you so specially in the Witness?"

Max blushed a little, although he answered lightly enough. "My dear little woman, when I was a single, and therefore a free, man, I usually indulged in the weekly you have mentioned, and now the desire to see it has returned."

"Indeed!" meditatively. "I suppose that 'now' means that you have tired of the novelty of our housekeeping together. I am sadly afraid that your freedom is lost forever—that is, if it is lost at all. However, to prove that I bear no malice because of the reflections cast upon me in your last speech, I'll bring the Witness."

"Thanks," with an exaggerated sigh of relief. "Now, run away and do your shopping, and have an easy mind concerning the youngsters."

"Good-bye! I won't be long, and when I come back I want a full confession,"

and away went the girl, looking, to Max, as his eyes followed her through the window, altogether too girlish to be mistress of even such a tiny home as "The Nest." Maitland's heart was in his eyes as he looked after his wife, and Eve, always much interested in her uncle, tried to fathom the meaning of his peculiar expression.

"Uncle," she said softly and seriously, and her childish orbs fixed intently on his face, "what makes your eyes so funny?"

"Are they funny?" he asked, with an amused smile.

"Yes, kind of wet and shiny."

Max stroked the child's hair. "I was thinking," he answered absently. "Don't you like the way my eyes look."

"Yes," with a huge sigh; "it is nice and soft, like" (hesitatingly, and then with more assurance)—"just like Mr Holloway looks sometimes."

"You are too observant, Eve," the man said, a little sharply; and then his tone softened. "Run away and play with Roy. I have some reading to do."

Obediently the child ran over to her brother, who was wholly engaged with a toy train which had that morning arrived by the postman's hands. Max picked up a book and tried to interest himself in it. To some extent he succeeded, but only partially because his mind was actively interested in the pages of the Witness which Naomi was to bring. Presently he gave up the pretence of reading, and simply waited. In due time his patience was rewarded, and Naomi tripped lightly down the path.

"Have you all been good?" she asked, as she entered the sitting room.

"Very," Max returned readily, and then his face fell—the Witness had not arrived. The girl noticed his dullness, and instantly remembered his commission.

"I am sorry, Max," she exclaimed impulsively; "but I forgot to bring the Witness."

"You might have remembered," he returned crossly, and immediately became interested in a book—apparently. For a moment Naomi watched him silently, trouble in her eyes. She was going to

speak again to him, but changed her mind, and very quickly went away to get rid of hat and jacket. When she returned, a minute or two later, there was a difference. Her face was very grave, and her movements had lost the spring which usually characterised them. She prepared tea, occasionally interchanging a word with the twins, but ignoring her husband altogether. He, in the meantime, was experiencing regret, but his ill-nature would not permit him to show it. After all, he reasoned peevishly, he did not often bother her with a special request she might have remembered.

He glanced over at the pretty little table which she was setting for him, and felt a cad. "I'll make it up to her after the youngsters are out of the way," he thought, and tried to comfort himself by hugging his good intentions. Somehow he was not successful, and his wretchedness was increased, when, after attending to his wants, Naomi gave the youngsters their tea in the kitchen, and—something which had not hitherto occurred during their three months of wedded life—partook of their meal, and did not sit opposite him, as was her custom.

As she cleared away his dishes he managed to meet her eyes once, and was alarmed by their severity. He fidgeted a little, and tried to find penitent words, but they would not come, and before he knew that his opportunity was gone, he heard her in the twin's bedroom.

"She'll soon be here now," he muttered. "What a beast I was to speak like that."

But the noise in the children's room ceased, and still she did not come. Max was becoming more miserable every moment. He looked impatiently at the clock: it was fully three-quarters of an hour since he had last heard her movements. What could she be about? The kitchen door opened, and her well-known footstep sounded a little wearily on the floor as she came across to the sitting room. The man uttered an exclamation as she opened the door.

"Where have you been?" he asked quickly.

"For a Witness" (coldly), and then she

passed on into the bedroom, and he heard her moving about there.

"Naomi," he called. And she came slowly to him.

"Yes," very, very quietly.

"Kneel down on the rug, please, sweet-heart; I want to talk to you."

She obeyed meekly enough; but Max was not pleased by her listlessness. "You are very angry with me," he said sadly.

"No, I am not," she answered, still listlessly. "I am only a little tired of everything."

"And I am more than a little sorry," he returned contritely. "Please, sweet-heart, forgive me for being such a bear."

She moved restlessly. "It was I who was at fault," very coldly. "I might have remembered about your wishes."

Max signed hopelessly. He deserved to be punished he knew, but still she might forgive him this once. A bright thought struck him, and, turning to the Witness, he opened it and looked quickly at the last page.

"Look," he said, and his voice was a little shaky. "this is why I wished so much to see the Witness."

And, looking, Naomi was surprised out of her listlessness, for, staring out at her from the printed page, was,

## THE WRECKERS OF MODERN TIMES.

By MAXWELL MAITLAND.

"You did not write it," she cried in a funny kind of voice which, somehow, sounded very sweet to the budding author. He blushed beautifully, as Naomi afterward told him mischievously.

"Yes, I did, little woman. Now, will you forgive me for the impatience I manifested? Really, I am very sorry."

"Of course"; and certainly her conduct for the next five minutes bore out her assertion, and completely raised Max out of the Slough of Despond.

"What a clever boy you are," she told him jestingly, yet with a suspicion of earnestness. "You'll make New Zealand famous."

"Hush, hush," remonstratingly. "Wait until you read it."

"All right," gravely; and then, in a

coaxing tone, "We'll wipe our piece of foolishness out of the book of remembrance, won't we, Max?"

"If you'll be good enough to forget what a cross-grained silly I was I'll be obliged," he answered earnestly. And so that matter was settled, although Naomi confessed before she turned her whole attention to the short story that she had that day received two great surprises.

"The first one was that I hadn't the faintest notion that I could feel as far away from you as I did, and the second was the sight of your name in print."

And Max drew her nearer to himself and looked over her shoulder as she devoured his story. He had a strange feeling of elation as he read the familiar words in their new guise. To see oneself in print for the first time is very wonderful, and although Max was not foolish enough to imagine himself a Dickens or a Thackeray, he liked it.

When she had finished, the young woman looked up, and her eyes were what Eve would have described as "soft and sliny."

"Dear," she said simply, "I like it very much. It is like a helping hand stretched out to weary toilers."

"Thanks," he answered, and found great satisfaction in her appreciation. Her comment upon his attempt at story-writing was very correct. As he wrote he had been filled with tenderness for the "lost" of our race, and in the lines which Naomi had just read was revealed this kindly feeling, and also the sterner indignation of a man who saw wherein the power to do and to make evil lay. He had not been afraid to touch on the unclean sores which society so diligently seeks to hide, but his purpose in so doing had obviously been one of healing. Although the tale was a short one, it was powerfully told, and revealed the fact that the writer possessed capabilities of something greater.

After the excitement had died down Naomi looked wonderingly at her husband.

"Why did you write?" she asked. His answer was graver than she had thought it would be.

"I wanted to take some little part in

the warfare between License and No-license. You see, dear," he continued with difficulty, for colonials are shy of expressing their deepest thoughts. "I used not to care; but, now that I have made up my mind to fight alcohol, I feel such a desire to be up and doing. Election day will be here before we know where we are, and I thought perhaps I could write something worth publishing. As a youngster I made many attempts."

"Who posted the story for you," queried Naomi.

"Mr Holloway. To some extent he was in my confidence, although he has not read the story. He found me scribbling one day, when you had taken the youngsters out, and was very anxious to read what I had written. Of course, I was too shy to allow him to do so" (smiling), "especially before I knew whether it would pass muster or not. I was afraid that the editor would consign it to the waste-paper basket."

"Good editor," remarked the girl. "I am positive that he is a very nice man."

Max laughed happily. "What a child you are," he exclaimed indulgently, and then silence brooded over them. It was the woman who first spoke.

"I wonder if Mr Holloway will be pleased with the story?" she said thoughtfully. "I hope so."

The man became grave. "Somehow I think not. Whenever I approach the subject of reform he turns restless. I don't quite understand him."

"Anyway," concluded Mrs Maitland wisely, "his views cannot affect us, although, of course, we wish to be in harmony with him if it is possible. But, after all, the only way is to do what we feel to be right, and leave the rest to a higher Power."

"Yes," assented Max gravely.

## CHAPTER X. AN OFFER.

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip  
To haud the wretch in order.  
But where ye feel your honour grip,  
Let that aye be your border.

—Robert Burns.



Holloway was restlessly pacing up and down in the little sitting room at The Nest. Max followed his movements with troubled eyes.

"You know," he ventured at last, seeing that the older man was not calming as quickly as he had hoped, "that I am sincerely grateful to you, Mr Holloway; but, I cannot accept your offer."

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted the angry man. "I do not wish for gratitude; but I wish that you would lighten Naomi's burden and show a little commonsense. If you were not both so independent, I could help you directly; but you are both as stubborn as mules. Write the articles that I want written, and you'll be well paid for them."

Max's face was flushed, and his eyes were sparkling with anger.

"Mr Holloway," he said, calmly, "you are taunting me concerning my unwillingness to spare my wife. Will you please leave this matter until she comes back, and then she shall decide for me."

"Decide for yourself, man," angrily. "This is your business."

"And hers also," added the man on the couch. "Look here, Holloway, sit down and talk quietly to me, and I'll try to make you understand."

"I quite understand," grimly, nevertheless he sat down and the anger died out of his eyes. "Now fire away, young man."

"Well," commenced Max, quietly, "you do me the honour to consider me capable of writing the articles you mentioned, and if I could, with a clear conscience, endorse the opinions which of necessity the articles would put forth, I would be delighted to essay the task. But I do not believe that the License system is beneficial to humanity, and I dare not try and persuade others that it is."

"Dare not! You will not, you mean," scoffed Holloway.

And the other smiled. "If you prefer it so," he answered "I will not write what you wish me to. But believe me, I am sorry that we are on different sides on this matter."

"Come over to my side," persuadingly. "Drop your foolish scruples."

"They are not foolish scruples, or I might do as you suggest. No; don't let us quarrel; but we must disagree."

For an instant the older man hesitated. "You will not do it for your own sake," he said, slowly; "will you do it for mine? I own several hotels in Invercargill, and it is in the papers which circulate down south that I wish your articles to appear. Here in Dunedin the cranks have not sufficient hold to cause alarm, but in Invercargill it will be a close thing. For my sake will you do this thing?"

Maitland shook his head regretfully. "It is impossible for me to do it for any considerations. Had it not been a matter of principle, I would have at once accepted your offer."

The hotel owner was silent. When he did speak it was to ask an irrelevant question:

"How is your health progressing?"

"Very favourably," Max answered, gladly. "The doctor was here this morning, and he informed me that in six weeks I'll be my old self completely. That makes my term of imprisonment fully a month less than I had anticipated. I don't feel nearly as much of a baby as I did, and Naomi declares that I'm unmanageable."

"Umph," drily, "and what does that young lady say to your story?"

Before answering, the prisoner looked intently at his questioner; would it be best to be quite candid?

"Well," slowly, "she liked it."

"What comment did she make?"

"She said"—here a faint blush betrayed the fact that the words about to be repeated were highly esteemed—"that it seemed like a helping hand held out to weary toilers."

"Umph," again, but not quite as drily as previously. "A very pretty sentiment, but far-fetched."

"In what way is it far-fetched?" asked Max, hotly. "Surely there are numbers of weary toilers who are striving to rid themselves of shackles which bind them and deprive them of their strength."

"Umph," tersely, "you are as unreasonable as Don Quixote. Are you quite sure that you will not avail yourself of this

opportunity to provide Naomi with a maid to help her in the house?"

"Quite positive," decidedly, although it was evident that Maitland winced at the question.

"At least, you will not write against me," Holloway insisted, and his companion felt decidedly embarrassed.

"I cannot promise even that," he answered, slowly; and then a bright idea struck him. "If you win Naomi's consent to my inactivity in the matter, I shall not go against her wishes," he added.

"Very well," said Holloway, and then he placed a kindly hand on Max's shoulder. "Don't bother your head about what I have been saying. For the most part I was trying you in order to see what kind of stuff you were made of. As you say, it is a pity that we disagree; but that cannot be helped, I suppose. And, Maitland," here the speaker cleared his throat. "I liked your little sketch. Once in the days gone by I might have felt as you do. Perhaps even now, who knows, but—" He broke off suddenly as Naomi and the youngsters appeared at the window, and in a moment the room was filled with merry chatter, in which the twins took a considerable part. They were delighted to see "Uncle Dick," as he had styled himself, and welcomed him cordially. Roy was especially warm in his greeting, the train which the previous morning had brought him had taken his fancy, and he overwhelmed his benefactor with thanks, much to that individual's embarrassment. At last in pity Naomi sent both children off to the shed.

"Now," she said laughingly, "we shall have peace." But the visitor was already looking for his hat.

"I must go," he declared. "Perhaps if you knew how dreadfully I have been worrying this husband of yours you would not invite me."

"Would I not?" in perplexed tones.

"Yes, you would, for I add my entreaties to yours. Mr Holloway, please honour us by staying to tea," Max said.

"Thank you, but I think not to-night. I have some business on hand." And despite

their urgent invitation, he persisted in his first intention and departed.

"What did he mean by saying that he had worried you?" the young wife asked anxiously. "He seemed in earnest."

"To some extent he was," Maitland returned, and proceeded to explain. She listened gravely, and sighed as he completed his narrative.

"No wonder he would not wait. I suppose he thought that I would worry him in return for his illtreatment of you; but I do not feel in the least inclined to do so, because I am so sorry for the man himself," she said very thoughtfully, and meditatively went down to the shed in order to bring in her charges.

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## CHAPTER XI. LIZZIE DEANE.

Thou know'st that thou has formed me  
With passions wild and strong;  
And listening to their witching voice  
Has often led me wrong.  
Where human weakness has come short,  
On frailty steeped aside,  
Do thou, All Good! for such thou art,  
In shades of darkness hide.

—Robert Burns.

Late that evening as Holloway sat moodily gazing into the fire, there came a knock at the door, and opening it he was surprised to see a slip of a girl. He did not recognise her until she spoke, and then he knew that his visitor was no other than the girl whom he had rescued from her doubtful position in Walker street.

"Well?" he asked, not unkindly.

"I haven't anywhere to go," was the muttered response.

Holloway looked as he felt impatient. "No where to go?" he repeated, suspiciously. "Why haven't you? What of the place you mentioned?"

Weariness was writ large on the pallid face raised to his, and in spite of himself the man was moved to kindness.

"Come in," he said, "and then tell me about it."

She obeyed listlessly—all the energy of life seemed to have left her—and sank into a convenient chair. Holloway noticed that she was clean and neatly dressed, also that

her hair was neatly coiled under a shabby hat.

"I've got the sack," she answered, bitterly, and she would not pay me until tomorrow. Dad got drunk and made a row, so she sent me off at once."

"And you want me to help you?"

"If you don't, I'll go on the streets," was the helpless answer. "I can't go anywhere else."

For a moment Holloway was tempted to answer impatiently. It was no business of his, and yet in a way it was. As far as he could gather the girl was unfortunate, but good, and she needed help from someone.

"Will you have a drink of something hot," he asked, as he saw her shiver. She nodded, and a few minutes later was sipping a cup of strong, black coffee, which the man had ordered. The hot liquid seemed to revive her a little.

"You are very good," she said slowly, "and I trouble you; but what could I do? I thought that at last I had a chance, but the drink spoilt it all."

"Not the drink," the man corrected, "but the man."

She stamped her feet with sudden passion, and her eyes blazed. "It is the drink," she cried; "my dad is a good sort, but he loses his senses when he drinks, and he nearly always does drink. Why don't you close these cursed places and give him and men like him, a chance?"

"I own several of 'these cursed places,'" Holloway told her, and was amazed at the result of his avowal. The girl stood up, scorn in her eyes and scorn in her voice.

"Do you?" she said, and the man writhed at the contempt expressed. "Then I wish no favours at your hand, for it is you, and men like you, who have ruined my father."

"Nonsense" (roughly), and he barred the door. "Where will you go if you refuse to let me help you? Out on to the streets, I suppose?"

She hid her face in her hands and moaned heart-brokenly. "I thought I could trust you, and you are one of them."

The hotel owner winced again at the horror in her tones. If he were a moral

leper she could not have spoken more scathingly than she had done. "You are unjust," he avowed quietly; "anyway I'll see about your room, and then you may go and sleep. That is what you need."

"Thanks" (very listlessly), and she returned to the chair she had vacated.

"Wait until I return," Holloway commanded—he was not quite sure that she intended to do so, and he did not wish to have her ruin upon his conscience—she made no answer, and he hurried away to make arrangements about her accommodation. In a moment he was back again, and not too soon, either, for the girl was hurrying toward the stairway.

"Come back," he said, almost roughly, and compelled her to return with him. Once safely back in his den he locked the door and pocketed the key. "Now," he continued, "we can talk, and you must give up all idea of running away, as I am charged with quite enough crime, according to your views."

Lizzie Deane looked defiantly at him. "When I came to you," she stated, still with that hateful note of contempt in her voice, "I thought that you were a true man. Once before you were good to me, and I remembered—very few have troubled me with kindness—but now I wish that I had trusted myself to Walker street rather than to you. You are one of those who murdered my mother."

It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of the bitterness of her words and manner. Holloway was shocked and self-condemned against his will.

"Before you charge me with any more crimes," he cried, hoarsely, "sit down and tell me all your reasons, all about your life."

Lizzie obeyed wearily. "All about my life," she repeated, softly; "there is not much to tell. Once, long ago, when I was a child, we were happy. Father, mother, and I lived in a neat cottage, and we had money to pay our way. I went to school, and meant some day to become a teacher. Poor little fool. I did not know that when the 'some day' arrived I would be homeless, motherless, and worse than fatherless. Now mother is dead, when the drink devil

entered dad she struggled with it, and so did he; but how could they hope to succeed while at almost every street corner there stood the open bar which provided so conveniently for his thirst? I wonder if you can understand" (with a sudden burst of agony), "what it meant to my mother to see her husband slowly but surely soaking himself with alcohol and making himself a drunken sot. It killed her, and only for a promise made to her that I would try and protect dad from himself, I would be dead too, for death is less terrible than this awful existence of mine. I have had three places, and to each of these dad has come and has been the cause of my dismissal. And I blame hotels, their keepers and owners, for all the havoc which has been wrought in my life. It was the custom of 'shouting' which first of all undermined dad's strength of will. Now, will you let me go?"

"No," answered the man, firmly, and looking up, the girl was surprised by the white misery of his face. "No, I will not let you go. To-night you shall sleep in the room which I have secured for you, and to-morrow I shall send you to a home wherein you will find shelter. Don't worry," he added, bitterly, as she would have rebelled. "You shall pay back every penny if you like."

Without more ado he handed her over to a maid, who bore her away to a bedroom, and then returned to his own gloomy reflections.

"What a hell her life has been," he muttered, restlessly; "but it cannot be that the open bar is responsible for it. It cannot be."

But even as he reiterated this fact, his conscience denied it, and the man groaned in spirit. What a selfish, useless life his had been. That Ruth's conduct had taken all the pleasure out of it, was no excuse; he might have spent himself for others, and in that way have justified his existence. He had not, and as he sat a lonely man looking back over the years, he felt humbled to the dust. He had been so faulty, so ready to listen to the wild voice of passion rather than to the calm tones of reason, and this was his reaping. Not

one soul in the world was the better for his existence, and this girl condemned him as a murderer. Surely he was not guilty to such an extent. Voicelessly he turned to the Most High, and in that hour of his deep contrition the Mediator bore his petitions for pardon and help to the One whose "arm is not shortened" to redeem and save.

Before retiring for the night, Holloway wrote a short note to Naomi, in which he explained Lizzie Deane's circumstances, and begged as a special favour that his friends would take on the girl as general helper.

"The inner room of the shed is quite habitable," he wrote, "and I shall send a man along to fix it up as a bedroom for the girl. Any furniture which is not of use to you in the cottage itself (I wish you to claim everything you care to), may remain in the shed. I am enclosing £10, which sum I wish you to expend on bedding, and anything necessary. If expenses exceed this sum, please draw on me and understand that I am responsible for the wages; but do not make Lizzie Deane aware of this fact, as she dislikes being under obligation to me. I shall be out of town for a few weeks, and when I return I expect to hear that the new inmate of the cottage is a decided success. Now, my dear young lady, do oblige me in this matter. I am a lonely man, and in my present frame of mind it seems to me that I have hitherto done nothing save evil to my race. Help me in some measure to make up to this poor girl.—Your mother's friend,

"RICHARD HOLLOWAY."

Next morning he despatched the girl with his letter to Naomi, and himself journeyed to Invercargill.

## CHAPTER XII. FATHER STRONG.

The history of the reformer, whether man or woman, on any line of action is but this: when he sees it all alone he is a fanatic; when a good many see it with him they are enthusiasts; when all see it he is a hero. The gradations are as clearly marked by which he ascends from zero to hero as the lines of latitude from the north pole to the equator.—Frances Willard.

Naomi looked eagerly up from the letter which she was reading. "Aunt Leslie is in love with Father Strong," she informed Max briskly, "and tells me to be sure to hear him when he comes to Dunedin."

"So you must, little woman," returned the man. "You and Ellice could go together, and Lizzie could take care of me." The girl had been with them a fortnight and had made herself a favourite with both husband and wife.

"I would like to go" (wistfully), "but Max it seems mean to leave you alone all the evening."

"Nonsense," cheerfully. "I wish to hear every word of the lecture. Remember that," he threatened, "or there will be war."

"And consequently a peacemaker will be required," added a quiet voice as Miss McPherson appeared in the kitchen. "Whatever is wrong down in the shed?" she continued; "I heard an awful uproar."

"It is only your cousins and Lizzie," answered Max composedly. "The young rascals seem wild down there."

"But who is Lizzie?" wonderingly, and Naomi explained the reason of her introduction to the household. Ellice was interested. "Your Mr Holloway is a strange man," she commented—"imagine an hotel-owner rescuing a girl in that fashion."

"But at heart Mr Holloway is not pleased with himself for being the owner of hotels," cried Mrs Maitland warmly. She was a loyal little creature and reflections cast on her friends always called forth from her a warm defence. "He is so good to the children, and besides——" Here she broke off suddenly and laughed as she caught her husband's amused glance.

"Hush," he cried—"Ellice will imagine that she has offended you."

"No, she won't," interrupted that individual. "she will learn her lesson, and in future be 'slow to judge the actor bad although swift to condemn the action' to be literal," she continued, smiling. "I'll think well of your friend, whether he gives me reason to do so or not."

The peace having thus been restored, Naomi turned the trend of the conversation, and presently the three were discuss-

ing the proposed visit of Father Strong. The visitor was speedily enthused by the eagerness which her friends manifested, and willingly promised to attend the lecture which was to be held a little later on in Dunedin.

Thus it came about that on the evening when the reverend gentleman faced a splendid audience in the Garrison Hall Mrs Maitland and Miss McPherson were part of the number whom his words swayed at will.

"What a little man he is" whispered Naomi, as she caught a first glimpse of the lecturer and before the evening was over she had traced many other points of resemblance between St. Paul and the modern apostle of Temperance.

Often Max had jestingly assured his wife that she should have been Irish—her high spirits, warm heart, fund of humour and impulsive ways belonged by right to a daughter of the Emerald Isle—and as she listened to the quaint kindly flow of language in which the Father voiced his message to the people of Dunedin her heart warmed within her. She noticed how the musical voice thrilled powerfully yet quietly through the hall as he spoke of ruined homes, of ruined lives, and, sadder still it seemed to the young wife, of ruined women. But even as tears stood in her eyes because of the pathetic story told so pathetically, another tale brimful of humour fell upon her ears and she found herself laughing in concert with the whole audience. But running like a golden thread through the whole of his message was the earnest purpose to right wrong and to reform.

The crowd which had that evening gathered itself to receive the Father was a mixed one—Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, and Wesleyans were there, and one and all were captivated by the earnestness of the speaker.

"He is a good man," Ellice said quietly as they waited for the crush to disperse before making their way out.

"He is that," answered Naomi enthusiastically. Her heart was full of warm feeling toward the Father. In her eyes he was more than a good man, he was a

hero. Just the previous day Mrs Leslie's second letter had reached her and in it her aunt gleefully told of an attempt made by the License party to win Father Strong to silence.

"They promised him £1000 for every £100 that the Prohibitionists would give him if only he would be silent. Imagine the insult to a man of his character. I suppose that he was justly indignant and rounded sharply on them. Anyway, I know that he absolutely refused. Isn't he splendid? Since our friends the publicans could not bribe Father Strong they have brought one of their own lecturers to Invercargill. This man was a Presbyterian minister. It is needless for me to comment upon his conduct in now taking sides with the oppressors of the people. But I am very sorry that he is a Presbyterian, since I happen to be one myself. However, I would not like to stand in his shoes when he faces the Judge of all the earth," she wrote, and then the letter branched off in other directions.

Mrs Maitland had not informed anyone of this offer which the publicans of Invercargill had made to the man who had thrilled her heart with fresh enthusiasm that night. Somehow she disliked doing so. Mr Holloway might have had a part in the matter, and she wished to shield him from blame, but her face was grave as she considered his probable implication. Ellice roused her from the painful reverie into which she had fallen by informing her that the way of exit was now clear, and together the two girls made their way out. At the door a man accosted them. It was Mr Holloway.

"I noticed you in the meeting," he observed, "and thought that unless you objected I would see you home."

"Thank you," answered Ellice briskly, although the remark was addressed both to Naomi and herself; "but I see Nurse Graham over yonder. We have arranged to go home together. Good-night."

Before either Naomi or Holloway could prevent her she was gone, and they were alone. The man turned to the girl and she noticed a new something in his manner which made conversation difficult.

"Come," he said briefly, "since Maitland cannot be on duty I will look after you. Shall we car it or walk?"

"I would rather walk," she answered, "the fresh air is invigorating."

"As they hurried along Naomi searched for words in which to clothe her gratitude to him. It was the first time that they had met since Lizzie Deane's advent at the cottage. The girl's services had proved a great boon to the delicately organised young housekeeper, not until she was able to give the care of the twins almost entirely to Lizzie had she realised how severe was the strain to which her nerves had been subjected. Finally she turned frankly to her companion. "I cannot express my gratitude to you for your many kindnesses," she said softly in a queer, shaky voice which proved the intensity of her emotion—"Lizzie Deane has made herself almost indispensable."

"Nonsense," he answered gruffly, "the thanks are due to you for obliging me in the matter."

"Please tell me how to prove that I realise your kindness," she begged earnestly.

"Take my arm and think as well of me as is possible," he answered very gently. "I know that we are on different sides in the License and No-license warfare, but you are still Ruth's daughter, and I am still your mother's friend."

"And mine," she added quickly and earnestly, touched by the loneliness in his tone. Her arm was within his, and she felt the comfort of it. He was so strong, it was a relief to feel the support. As for the man, the gentle pressure was to him exquisite, but he was not sure whether the feeling which predominated within him was pleasure or pain, for it was Ruth's daughter and not Ruth who walked beside him.

At the gate of the cottage he stopped. "Not to-night," he answered in reply to Naomi's entreaties that he should go in and have supper, "but to-morrow I shall come. I have many things to tell you. In the meantime," and here a wistful, pleading note was discernible in the strong voice, "think as well as you can of me."

"Of course," answered the girl, "I think a great deal of you." Her impulsive, warm heart overcame conventionality. Holloway was bending his tall form to shut the gate, and with a sudden, quick movement she touched his face with her lips, then fled toward the cottage alarmed at her own daring. Once within the sitting room her vivid colour and embarrassed air informed Max that something unusual had occurred.

"Hulloa, dear," he cried, "what have you been doing?"

"Something very dreadful," she answered demurely, although the twinkle in her eyes betrayed her. "If you'll allow me to lower the lamp I'll tell you."

Without waiting for permission she did as she wished, and then knelt down by the couch. "Max," she said in a shame-faced fashion, "you'll be shocked; although it is dark it is hard to confess."

"Not I," he answered lightly: "hurry up."

"Well" (meekly), "Mr Holloway was at the meeting and he came home with me." Here she hesitated; it was difficult to confess, but it was worse to think of not confessing. "And he was so miserable and lonely that I——"

"Hurry up," cried Max as she faltered, and she essayed again. "I kissed him," she whispered.

Max threw back his head and laughed until the tears came. "Dear little woman," he said, and if he followed her example and stole a kiss, who shall blame him?

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### DAVID DEANE.

We must endure—but not because

The world imposeth woe;

Prayers hold a better power than dreams,

And leave her far and low;

We cannot meet her cruel eyes,

When ours are lifted to the skies—

When ours are lifted to the cross,

The love-in-sorrow reading!

—Mrs Browning

Dry-eyed but heart-broken Lizzie Deane sat alone in the shed. Her father was dead—he had been killed while drunk by a passing car, and the girl felt the bitterness of death. She had just come back

from viewing his mangled body, and she felt as though death would be preferable to the long separation from him whom she had promised to care for.

"Mother will know everything now," she muttered to herself. "She has passed within the veil. But what of daddy? Is he with her, or is he set apart and condemned already?"

The horror of the thought forced a groan from her, and Holloway heard it as he entered the door. He had arrived at the cottage as he promised, and Naomi had urged him to endeavour to console the girl.

"Poor child," he said compassionately, "poor child."

"Don't speak to me," she cried wildly. "It is your work. He was drunk, and now he is dead, and the cursed drink is responsible for his death. God in heaven" (passionately) "if there be a God, how can You be so cruel? He was so good until the drink-devil entered into him, and now it has murdered him. God, be good to my daddy."

The words were awful because of the intense agony which was apparent in the white face and wild, tearless voice. The man lowered his head in awe, and from his heart also went up a petition for mercy.

"Lizzie," he commenced kindly "calm yourself. You can do no good, and you are making yourself ill."

"Calm myself!" she moaned. "How can I when my daddy lies dead, and I can do nothing for him? What if God is not good to him because of the black darkness which the drink cast over his soul? I cannot stand it; I must find out."

The wild light in her eyes alarmed Holloway, and, as on a previous occasion, he barred her way. "You must not go," he said firmly. "You can do nothing, and you must not distress yourself about your father. He is in God's hands."

"But God is cruel, so cruel," groaned the poor creature. "He will damn my daddy. He must not. God, don't," she almost screamed, "don't—he was a such a good daddy before the drink came."

The listener turned away, man though

he was. The wild, despairing anguish of the drunkard's daughter was more than he could bear. Tears stood in his eyes, and his face was almost as heart-broken as her own when he again faced her, for was not it true that he was partly to blame for the man's death? On the previous election day he had voted for License. Perhaps, probably, had No-license been carried David Deane would not have died a drunkard's death. Remorse gnawed at his heart-strings and made speech almost impossible.

"Stay here until I send you a comforter," he begged hoarsely, and flew up the path to the cottage.

Naomi started when she saw his stricken face. "What fresh trouble is it?" she asked anxiously.

"Only this, that the girl thinks me one of her father's murderers," he groaned. "Go to her yourself. She is almost out of her mind with agony. I think she will listen to you now," he added, for Mrs Maitland had previously tried to console Lizzie, but the girl's stony silence had made the effort useless. As Naomi hurried to do his bidding he went into Max, and the younger man noticed that his face had aged dreadfully in the few moments which had elapsed since he went down to the shed.

"I am sorry, Holloway," Maitland said sincerely, "don't take it to heart so much. Lizzie is beside herself with trouble."

"Yes" (listlessly), "nevertheless there is enough truth in her assertion to make me sick at heart." He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

In the meantime Naomi was finding her task at once easier and more difficult than she had anticipated. Lizzie was only too anxious to listen, but she asked questions which wrung her young mistress's heart with pain.

"Is it true," she cried piteously, "that your God will not be good to my father now? Somewhere in the Bible it says, 'As the tree falls so shall it lie.' My poor daddy, he was so good to me when the drink was not in him."

And this was the burden of her agony. She feared that the great God, concerning Whom she knew so little, would not be good to her father. Mrs Maitland was a

Christian, nevertheless she was inexperienced in speaking of religion. Somehow it was her own heart of love which gave her wisdom to comfort and soothe. A quick prayer winged its way into the presence of God, and in speedy answer the necessary assistance was sent her.

"Lizzie," she said firmly, "listen to me. You know that God is our Father, that He loves us. He is infinitely greater in love and mercy than we can understand. Trust your father to Him, dear."

"What if He is cruel?" cried the girl. "Mrs Maitland He must not be cruel to daddy."

"He will not be cruel. He is Love. Listen, Lizzie; nowhere in the Bible is the name of Cruelty given to God. We are not even told that His name is Justice, but we are told that He is Love and that His name is Love."

This reasoning soothed the sore heart and found its way to the tired, restless brain. "God is Love," the girl muttered to herself, "then He must act as is best for dad."

Presently she suffered Mrs Maitland to assist her to bed. The storm of grief which had passed over her had completely exhausted her strength. This accomplished, Naomi made her way back to the cottage. It was now eventide, and the accident had taken place in the early morning. "What an awful day," reflected the girl sadly, "and I had such bright expectations. I hoped that Mr Holloway's 'many things' meant that we were to hear that he had changed his views."

She opened the door softly and went through to the sitting room. Max was alone. "Where are the others?" she asked in surprise.

Holloway is putting the twins to bed. He gave them their tea and then they suggested that he turn nurse. I allowed him to do so because it was good for him to have something to do," answered Max softly. "Come over here and tell me about your experience."

Naomi obeyed. It was a very subdued little face that looked into her husband's while she made known to him Lizzie's agony of mind.



"I was right in maintaining that God is Love, even under such dreadful circumstances," she asked wistfully. "Don't you think so, Max?"

"Yes, of course. God is Love. I am sadly afraid that we too often limit His powers," Max replied gravely. "When we think about the great sacrifice which He made in order to save His finite creatures, we must confess that His love is limitless. The problem which Lizzie's question raises is a very difficult one, and the only solace which she and others in a similar position can have is that God is Love and that He is infinitely merciful, whereas we, who feel for Lizzie's grief so deeply, are merely finite."

"And surely that is a consolation," ejaculated Naomi gladly, yet solemnly, for that day she had felt the mystery of life and death.

Steps sounded in the little passage which connected the rooms, and Holloway appeared. "May I come in?" he asked, as he noticed the attitude which the young wife had taken—she was in her favourite position, kneeling on the rug by the couch and resting her face on Max's pillows.

"Of course," she answered briskly, "there is plenty of room and you must talk to Max while I prepare tea."

"Thanks," with a wan smile which made her feel very pitiful, "I thought I was on hallowed ground."

"You were right in so thinking," Max affirmed gravely. "Naomi and I have been discussing sacred subjects; nevertheless, there is plenty of room for you," he added, the last words with a smile.

Naomi rose from her lowly position. "Do your duty," she commanded with an assumption of lightness which she was far from feeling, "and when tea is ready you shall be rewarded for your efforts at conversation. But, first of all, Mr Holloway, please help me to move this table." The table referred to was a medium-sized round one, which stood in the centre of the room. Holloway obeyed the girl's wishes and wheeled it toward Max's couch. Naomi was a dainty little creature, and the table to which she and Mr Holloway presently drew in their chairs—Max's couch was

already in position—was as dainty and as sweet as herself. At least both Holloway and her husband thought so.

"You are a fortunate man," observed the visitor to his host as Mrs Maitland washed up dishes in the kitchen, and he sighed a deep sigh.

"I am aware of that," was the satisfied answer, and then Naomi herself appeared. She found a convenient footstool and seated herself upon it.

"Now," she said, "I wish you to tell us the 'many things,' Mr Holloway."

"Very well," answered simply. "As you know, I went down south on business. I wished to dispose of my property there, and I could have done so had I been content to allow the present occupiers to buy them. At least in two cases I had good offers, but the other man is sadly afraid that No-license will be carried in Invercargill next election day, and he was afraid to risk buying."

"Why did you not sell the two hotels to their keepers?" Naomi asked breathlessly.

"Because," was the slow, deliberate answer, "I had decided to sever my connection with the License party altogether, and I would not feel justified were I to sell to men who would use my property for hotels."

Naomi made no comment, but her brown eyes glowed brilliantly, and the man continued—"When I set out for Invercargill I had but a faint hope of selling my property, but I thought that I might be able to get rid of my present tenants and so prevent liquor from being sold there. However, I was unable to do so as arrangements concerning the leasing of the hotels were made by agents, and are binding until the next day of decision arrived. So my attempt to do good was a failure."

"Was it?" asked Max. "I think not, for it showed your new views, and made Naomi and I proud of you."

"It did that" his wife eagerly agreed. "I am glad, so very glad, Uncle Dick."

And Holloway gave her a grateful glance. It was the first time that she had ever called him that. Before he left The Nest he accompanied her to the shed. She entered it and stole in to the inner room.

Lizzie was sleeping peacefully. The man received her favourable report gladly, and then bade Naomi good-night. As he held her hand he looked wistfully at the girlish face.

"I am Uncle Dick and an old man," he reminded her in a low tone.

And understanding, the girl raised her face frankly and freely as a child.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN WHICH THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

I remember the gleams and glooms that dart Across the schoolboy's brain;  
The song and the silence in the heart.  
That in part are prophecies, and in part  
Are longings wild and vain.

—Longfellow.

It was not often that the spirit of discontent possessed Max Maitland. He was too much in love for that to be possible often, but one afternoon about six weeks after the events recorded in the last chapter he was very much "down in the dumps," as we term the most extreme stage of depression. Apparently there was little cause for his low spirits. He was practically his old self, and expected to resume business within a fortnight. Oddly enough it was that very fact which had reduced him to misery. He simply could not endure the thought of resuming the old routine.

"Hang it," he muttered impatiently. Naomi was out, and in consequence he was at liberty to give his ill-humour full vent. "I am sick of figures."

He gazed moodily out of the window, but found no consolation there." If only I were a farmer or a writer," he continued drearily, "life would be so much more worth living. Figures are so sickening."

By which confession it will be plain to every reader that the young man was not cut out for a clerk. As a matter of fact he was not; but circumstances had forced him into the position, and once having got into the ruts, it had never seriously occurred to him to try and get out of them. Certainly he had occasionally contemplated striking out on new lines, but only occa-

sionally, and that was before Naomi entered into his life. After that work had been pleasant because only by it could he hope to make a home for his little woman. But five months of enforced leisure, in which books had been his constant companions, had brought back with renewed strength his boyhood's dreams.

"If only I had money and leisure in which to study I would try my luck at writing," he burst forth after a long, dreamy reverie; "or even were I a farmer I would be content, but to go back to those old books and ledgers is simply hateful."

Presently he pulled himself together. "There is an evil spirit in me," he confessed to Eve's doll, which stared solemnly up at him. "Here am I, the possessor of a sweet little woman and a cosy little nest, making myself miserable just because I cannot have everything I wish for. Maxwell Maitland," he added with greater severity, "I am thoroughly ashamed of your behaviour."

Having relieved his mind to this extent he opened the French window and stood for a moment on the verandah. The air was delicious, although cold, and he drew a long, deep breath of enjoyment. Despite his self-condemnation his eyes became serious, and his thoughts wandered away along the profitless road of "what might have been."

"I can't help it," he cried rebelliously. "I do dislike the idea of spending my three-score years and ten in an office."

"You'll be more fortunate than the rest of your fellows if you do so," remarked a sarcastic voice. "Old age comes quickly on a man after his three-score years have passed, and usually the other ten are spent in bed."

Turning quickly Max found himself face to face with Mr Holloway. That individual was enjoying the young man's red face and evident discomfiture immensely.

"Whom were you talking to?" he demanded mischievously.

"I had a very small audience," Max confessed rather crossly. He felt that he had made himself ridiculous, and in con-

sequence was on his dignity. "You came along very quietly," he added.

"Give the blame to rubber heels," was the cool answer; "but, my dear fellow, what ails you?"

"Nothing," returned Max, still very shortly—men do so hate to feel that they have made fools of themselves—"Come inside."

Holloway accepted the invitation. Then he laughed outright so mirthfully that against his will Max joined in and forgot his offended dignity.

"I've been in a discontented mood," he admitted a moment later, "and have been wanting 'the other fellow's' job."

"Umph" (drily) "that is something which most people are guilty of at some period of their lives. Which of the 'other fellows' jobs' do you desire?"

The younger man laughed bitterly. "What is the use of talking about it?" he asked. "It is a profitless business."

"Maybe" was the answer, "but I wish to know. What would you like to be if you were in a position to choose over again your life-work?"

The question was gravely asked, and it stirred into sudden life all the dear, hopeless desires in the man's heart. "What would I like to be?" he cried. "I would like to cultivate any little talent for writing which I possess, and then to use it."

"You should not have belittled yourself," Holloway commented. "I dislike your words, 'any little talent.' You know that you have both the ability and the desire to write."

Max nodded his head. After all he was talking to another man, and there was no need of mock-modesty. "I believe that I can write, and perhaps in the future I shall do so," he said quietly; "but at present I must go back to figures."

There was a brief silence, then Holloway spoke, and Maitland could scarcely realise the import of his words. "Maitland," the older man told him, "you need not return to your desk unless you prefer doing that to taking the position which I offer you. I am empowered by the R— (mentioning a certain Christchurch paper which had a

large circulation) to offer you the position of reporter."

Max gasped. "But I have no experience" he protested, not daring to believe his ears.

"Of course not" Holloway answered, "but you have ability and common sense, also a knowledge of shorthand. Without that last you would have been at a loss."

"But, but," again essayed Maitland. He was too astonished for coherent speech.

"It is all right" (soothingly); "the editor is an old friend of mine, and I told him that I had discovered a budding Dickens. Take heart, young man. Dickens was a reporter, and it was from that he turned to original work. He took my word for it, and is prepared to make a trial of your abilities." Not a hint was given of the speaker's special journey to Christchurch, and his earnest, persuasive conversation with the editor. That worthy man could not deny that he wished for a Dunedin reporter, but he maintained that an experienced man was necessary. Only the memory of his boyhood and his boyhood's friend kept him from absolutely and positively declining to entertain Holloway's suggestion. Eventually that suggestion had been accepted, and Maitland was chosen to fill the vacant place. When his friend had succeeded in making this delightful fact known to him, Max felt as though he wished to throw his cap in the air and shout for joy. Only to himself was known the bitterness with which he had contemplated eating his heart out with uncongenial work, now he felt a new being.

"Holloway, I cannot thank you," he cried and could get no further because of a lump in his throat. The other smiled.

"Thanks are unnecessary between friends," he asserted quietly, "but Maitland your head is on the clouds. You have not made any inquiries concerning your salary." And then he proceeded to state liberal terms. "Of course," he concluded, "the position is very fair, but it is not much in advance of your former, or to be correct, your present one. The reason for congratulation lies in the fact that you are a born newspaper man!"

Max laughed. "You mean well," he re-

turned; "but the term 'newspaper man' is not exactly to my taste. It is too suggestive of scraps. About my present situation," he continued, becoming grave, "there will be no difficulty, for Morrison has taken on another man in my place. Of course it was only a temporary arrangement, but now the other fellow won't need to go, and I am glad because of that."

"Naomi will be pleased, I think" jaloused Holloway. "She has great faith in you."

Max agreed quietly, but the visitor saw the deep content in his eyes and realised how much the two were to each other.

"Now," he said briskly, "I must depart, for I have some letters to write. By the way," he called as he stepped off the verandah, "you will have to commence your work in a fortnight."

"Very well," returned Max happily—he was not afraid to tackle the work although quite aware of his inexperience—"Holloway, come back for a minute."

Holloway came back to the window and stood waiting, but Maitland found words difficult. He gripped the other's hand. "If ever I become anything worth while," he said huskily, "it will be due to you and Naomi."

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## CHAPTER XV. THE RETURN.

Eyes, which the preacher could not school.  
By wayside graves are raised;  
And lips say, "God be pitiful,"  
Who ne'er said, "God be praised,"  
Be pitiful, O God.

—Mrs Browning.

There is something mournfully sweet in returning to the place where our loved, lost one used to move. So Robert Miller found as he wandered through the rooms of his home. Contrary to his first intentions he had only remained out of New Zealand for nine months, and was now back at Briarwood Farm. The longing for kent faces and the peace of home had driven him back to our island. Only old Hannah was aware of his presence at the farm, and after three days she was urgent in her entreaties that he should immediately

bring the twins home.

"You are moping again," she told him frankly. "Bring the bairns home. They will comfort you and gladden the old house besides," she added wisely. "This is their proper place. Mrs Maitland has been good to you long enough."

"Very well," he answered obediently. "I will go to Dunedin, but do not send word of my coming."

Then he wandered away to the cemetery and stood beside his wife's grave. She had been his companion for such a little time. He grudged her to God, and longed inexpressibly for her dear presence. So many things they had meant to do together and now the bare, desolate "Now" chilled him.

But now it is the churchyard grass,  
We look upon the longest,  
Be pitiful, O God.

he murmured, and the concluding prayer was very sincerely asked. When life flowed by like a joyous song he had not always remembered his Creator, but now his wife was in the keeping of the Invisible One, and he realised the necessity of prayer. For hours he remained on that quiet spot—God's Acre, as someone has named it—and he was strengthened by his communion with the Unseen.

"God!" he whispered reverently, "help me to be worthy of Grace; give me power to conquer."

And then, just as the shadows of evening fell he retraced his steps to the farm. Old Hannah looked curiously at him. "He has been to her grave," she murmured, "and yet his eyes are strong and his manner bright. His trip has benefited him greatly."

Hannah was a wise woman, but all things were not revealed to her.

On the following afternoon Naomi was astonished beyond measure to see her brother-in-law enter her gate. She reached him quickly.

"Robert, where did you come from?"

"To-day's train brought me from Fulton," he answered quickly; "but I have been almost a week in New Zealand. Now I have come for the children. Where are they?"

"Out in the back yard playing," she answered, leading him into the sitting-room. He did not seat himself, but stood listening eagerly to the childish voices which came to his ears through the open door. Mrs Maitland smiled at his impatience. She was delighted that he had at last felt the need of Grace's children. "Shall I bring them in?" she asked.

"No," he answered shakily, "I would rather go to them."

"Very well, just make your way through." Before the words had died away into silence Miller was outside. The youngsters were playing ball and did not notice the advent of a third person until he called to them. They came at his bidding, and then before Eve realised what was happening she found herself held in somebody's arms. She looked steadily and wonderingly into the face of the unceremonious stranger, and found in him her daddy.

"Daddy," she cried joyfully, and at the word Roy also realised the situation, and made a manful endeavour to get his share of loves. He clung round his father's legs until the serious inconvenience caused thereby to those useful members compelled Miller to put down Eve and turn to his little son. After which Roy found himself treated on much the same fashion as Eve had been. Then, taking them by the hand, the returned wanderer re-entered the cottage.

For the remainder of the afternoon Eve kept close to his side. Indeed, for the most part she sat on his knees and could scarcely be persuaded to go to bed when bed-time came.

"I'm never going to leave you again, little one," he assured her, "and in the morning you will find me still here."

Satisfied with this assurance the child meekly followed her aunt, but the next morning she was up very early. Arrayed only in her little white night gown she crept into the sitting room where her father had been accommodated with a bed on the couch. He was still asleep, but her soft fingers wakened him, and he drew the little figure in beside him. For half an hour he kept her there, and during that

time his appreciation of his little daughter was intensified. She was so loving and so lovable that he was comforted and brightened by her quaint little speeches and irresistible ways.

"Go away back to bed," he said finally, "daddy must get up." So saying he kissed her in such a hearty manner that her poor little face reddened wofully. Involuntarily she put up her hand to soothe the ill-used cheek. Miller felt his chin.

"Poor, little, Eve," he said remorsefully, "I forgot that I needed a shave. 'Don't you like daddy's kisses?'"

"Yes," she told him, and bravely put up her face for another infliction. Such are the ways of womenkind, even of the youngest of them. The caress she received was more considerably given than the former one had been and with a happy heart the mite stole back to her cot.

Her father dressed quickly and sauntered out on to the verandah. Presently he was joined by Max Maitland.

"You are up early," the newcomer commented cheerily. "How did you sleep?"

"Excellently," was the answer, "but I was awakened in rather an unusual manner," and he proceeded to relate his experience. Max laughed, although when he spoke there was a regretful note in his voice. "Naomi and I will miss your youngsters," he remarked slowly; "they were very taking—in fact they have stolen both our hearts. But, of course, it is better that they should go home. Hannah will look well after them."

"Yes," assented Miller rather absently, and after a moment's silence he added: "I am sorry that my cousin Ellice has moved from Fulton, for my own sake of course. She was so fond of the bairns I had hoped that she would supervise them a little; but, of course, as you say, Hannah will do her best only she is rather old. I shall need to find a younger woman to help generally in the house."

"Then you have not far to look, for Naomi has a splendid girl here helping, and of course we did not intend keeping her on after the twins went home. She is very much attached to Eve and Roy, and I am sure would not mind going to

the country with them" cried Max quickly. At this juncture his wife joined them, and to her he explained matters.

"Lizzie is fond of the youngsters," she said meditatively, "but she has not been used to country life."

"After breakfast I shall ask her," stated Miller. "I am interested in what you have told me concerning her history, and would like to have her as helper."

He followed his intentions, and was successful in gaining the girl's services. The Maitlands were very much pleased by Lizzie's decision, so were the twins, and even Mr Holloway, when he heard of the matter, gave his approval. Thus that matter was settled to Miller's satisfaction, but there was another which worried him.

"Do you ride?" he asked Naomi suddenly, after Max had gone out.

"No," she answered. "I can ride, but I don't care to. Besides, I have not got a bicycle."

"Unph" (with embarrassment); "would you like one, Naomi?"

"No," very decidedly and with quickened colour, "of course not."

"But," persisted the man, "I wish you to accept some little thing from me. I am your debtor to such a great extent."

"You are not," she flatly contradicted. "You paid me for the bairns' keep."

"But I did not, and I never can, pay you for all the trouble," he maintained. "Come now, be good and accept a bicycle."

"Honestly," she assured him, "I don't wish for one. Dunedin is too hilly; besides, the cars are so convenient."

"Well, then," he begged, "have something else in its place."

"Really, Robert," with a spice of independence, "you are absurd. The whole arrangement was purely a business transaction. Please drop the subject."

"Very well" with a sigh which belied the twinkle in his eyes. He was not vanquished, but he was biding his time. Even as he spoke to Naomi a sudden inspiration had flashed into his brain, and it was this that caused the twinkle to appear. To his right stood a small table, and upon

it was deposited a writing desk. Sundry papers littered both the desk and table. It was this that had caught the farmer's eye.

Next morning Miller visited the hospital in order to see Ellice. What transpired during that visit Naomi never fully learned, but to some extent her brother-in-law enlightened her.

"I told Ellice that I regretted her absence from Fulton," he said slowly; "but she seems to have made up her mind to devote her life to nursing. It seems a pity. She would make some man an excellent wife."

Mrs Maitland laughed, albeit her colour rose. How could it be otherwise, when the memory of Ellice's mournful words was with her? "Did you tell your cousin your opinion?" she asked bluntly.

"Yes" (simply), "Ellice is such a restful woman, it seems a pity that she won't make one of our Fulton bachelors happy."

"To how many is she necessary?" in an amused tone.

"Harry Sloan and Harvey Harrison are both single men on her account, and both are good fellows," was the answer. How blind the man was!

Two days later Miller, Lizzie, and the twins journeyed to Fulton.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

Say never, ye loved once!  
God is too near above, the grave below,  
And all our moments go  
Too quickly past our souls, for saying so!  
The mysteries of Life and Death avenge  
Affections light of range—  
There comes no change to justify that change,  
Whatever comes—loved once.

—Mrs Browning.

Max had just finished setting up the secrétaire, and his wife clapped her hands with gladness.

"What a beauty," she cried. "Really, dear, I have quite forgiven him, although, of course," in a vexed tone, "he was very foolish to spend so much money on us."

"He was that," Max agreed sincerely, and then his delight found expression. "It

is just splendid," he avowed stepping back to look more fully at their new possession. In truth it was a handsome piece of furniture and useful withal as Naomi pointed out.

"I am going to put mother's letters in one of these drawers," she informed Max impetuously and ran away to gather her papers together. When she came back her face was thoughtful. "It is years since I looked over these," she remarked. "I have not the faintest idea of what are here. Sit down, Max, and I'll give you some to look over. I suppose that there is nothing of importance, but I would like to make sure before putting them away again."

Maitland obeyed, and together they went through the old letters. Some were very trifling, having been written to Mrs Binnie by casual friends, and others were in the writing of Naomi's father, but it was at those written by her mother that the girl looked longest and with the most interest.

Suddenly she started. Max looked up, and in response to his questioning glance she handed him an envelope in which two letters were enclosed. They were written in different writings. The one which enclosed a smaller note was a man's letter, and the other was a woman's—Ruth's. Max looked at the faint signature, and he also started. "This is Holloway's writing," he cried.

"Yes," answered his wife in a low tone, "and the other writing is my mother's. Read it, dear."

He did so, and his eyes grew sad as he understood the pathos of the faded, yellow note.

"Dear Dick," it ran, "they tell me I am dying, and my heart is heavy within me because of the wrong which I did you. Surely it is not now sinful to confess that in the days gone by I made a mistake. My husband is dead, but the realisation of my mistake has been with me for years—before his death, and indeed soon after our marriage. To speak ill of the dead is not seemly, and he was my husband; but, Dick, if you have suffered so have I. Death is not very dreadful to me, for life has lost its pleasure. Be good to my chil-

dren, and remember me as I was in those early days. Forgive me, and in the land where tears are not we shall meet again. It is you whom I loved, and now it is too late.—RUTH."

Tears were in the girl's eyes as her husband gave her back the letters. "Poor mother," she murmured, "and poor Mr Holloway."

Max's own eyes were misty. "It is a tangle," he admitted gravely, "but we must leave it for more skilful hands than ours to unravel. Are you not content to do so, dearie?"

"I am," she answered with quivering lips, "but it is heart-breaking."

"By this time your mother understands," the man whispered softly. "Little wife, I am glad that you found the letters. The knowledge contained in the note will make a new man of Holloway. Hitherto he has had no hope. Now he can look forward to a reunion."

"I shall take the envelope and its enclosures to him," Naomi said, whereupon Max stated his intention of accompanying her that evening. And so it came about that half an hour later the two found themselves being whirled in the direction of the hotel where Holloway had taken up his quarters. He was alone, and delighted to see them.

"Come in" he invited cordially, and drew forward easy chairs, but Naomi shook her head.

"Uncle Dick," she said softly "I have brought you some letters. Robert Miller presented us with a secretaire, and as I was putting all mother's letters into one of its compartments I came across these." As she spoke she handed him the soiled envelope. He took it eagerly.

"Thanks," he murmured and then opened out the letters. When next he looked up the room was empty.

"After all these years," he whispered softly to himself. "Dear, little Ruth. How different life would have been had I known," and then he re-read the faint lines again. How wonderful the assurance of love seemed to him. The years between rolled away, and life was joyous and abundant. She was his although for 30 long weary years he had told himself that she

was not and never had been. O the sting of that hideous thought! Its finality had robbed him of all consolation. He pressed the faded writing to his lips. It was almost too good and too wonderful to be true. Suddenly he remembered about the other letter and he straightened it out in order to decipher its contents. It was the last letter he had written to Ruth, and breathed of passionate, undying love. Its strains were joyous and full of hope. The writer, as he put pen to paper had thought of the future in which he and the girl to whom he was opening his heart would share all things. "When you are tired of Mrs Leslie, come back to me, sweet heart, for I need you, and whenever you say the word the old house will be set in order for its new mistress," the man read, and as he realised how very far away was his best youth and its pleasant, rosy-hued dreams, he felt very sorry for himself. But only for a moment did self-pity occupy him. A glance at the faintly-fragrant note which the woman he loved had written him on her deathbed dispelled that feeling and brought radiant hope into his heart.

"In the land where tears are not," he repeated. "Yes, Ruthie, you and I shall meet again, and there shall be no sorrow on that day."

As will have been apparent, Holloway was a strange compound of good and evil. For almost 30 years he had lived a careless, self-seeking life, in which there had not been room for anything but himself, but Naomi's entrance into his life had called into being the long dead impulses and generous emotions of his youthful self. Truly, he had wasted the best part of his life, but he had done so because it was well-nigh unendurable to himself. He had worked at money-gaining, but the excitement of the effort held him in thrall, not the success with which the pursuit was crowned. He had been selfishly eager to forget himself and his suffering, and being so had thought it best to choke all the love and softness out of his heart. But that remedy had not been effectual and not until Naomi looked with Ruth's eyes up into his face had the old wound commenced

to heal. Now Ruth's own words came as a soothing balm and completed the work of healing. He would go softly until the day of his death, but he was no longer the desolate man who evoked deep pity in Mrs Maitland's tender heart. Someone has said that our loved ones look down from above and see us through the veil of the heavens. Of this fact Holloway was convinced, knowing that Ruth loved him, he was sure that throughout bygone years and at the present time she was taking a tender interest in his earthly life.

"Dearie," he murmured, the deep light of an inner thought in his eyes, "I shall seek to be more worthy, God helping me."

And yet Richard Holloway was a practical business man, and not a visionary dweller in air-castles. How strong is the subtle link which binds us to the unseen world of spirits in which the one who is the Spirit reigns.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### SALES.

I winna blaw about mysel;  
As ill I like my faults to tell.

—Burns.

"Naomi," suggested Ellice suddenly, "let us go shopping."

Mrs Maitland stared blankly at her friend. "I thought that you wished to have a nice, sociable afternoon with me."

"Well, that is so," returned the other quickly; "but, my dear woman, I have just remembered that the sales are on."

"The sales!" repeated Naomi in amazement: "what sales?"

"You poor, ignorant creature," cried the nurse in mock consternation; "don't you know that several of the large drapery establishments are being very generous this month, and are literally giving away goods, at least so their advertisements say."

The young housekeeper shrugged her shoulders. "If you really wish to go," she answered readily, "I'll accompany you, but I don't approve of sales. They are an invention of the Evil One, to tempt women to needless extravagances."

"Thank you. Now go and put on your



'things.' (By the way, have you ever noticed how exclusively feminine is the use of this little word?) "I am eager for the fray."

Away went Naomi, to re-appear a moment later robed in outdoor attire. "I warn you," she solemnly informed her visitor, "that my purse is very light. Max's birthday comes next week, and I have set my heart on treating him to as many books as is possible."

Miss McPherson laughed. "Naomi, please notice that I asked you to go shopping. There is a difference between buying and shopping."

"What is the difference?" queried her ignorant friend.

"Well" (readily), "when the average woman goes shopping, which she very often does, she causes the poor shop assistant to pull down half the contents of his shelves and then majestically sails away after ordering him to send her a penny piece of tape."

"Ellice, you are libelling your sex in an outrageous fashion," cried Naomi indignantly. "I have never acted like that in my life. Have you?"

"No" (hesitatingly), "but then we are not average women."

"How absurd! Well, give me a description of the woman who goes out on a buying expedition?"

Ellice looked painfully solemn. "I don't like to hurt your feelings," she stated in a concerned tone, "but really I have never heard of such an insane creature."

The younger girl's laugh trilled merrily out, and the nurse could not resist the infection.

"But seriously, Ellice," resumed Mrs Maitland, "do you approve of sales?"

"For my own part," was the candid reply, "I think that they are excellent. They are powerless to tempt me to extravagance—probationers have nothing to be extravagant with,—and I usually contrive to pick up some very useful articles. You are amused," she continued, "at my air of experience, but even in sleepy little Fulton we have sales."

"There, at anyrate, the drapers would be

free from competition," was the amused comment.

Ellice shook her head. "No, indeed," she said. "Two separate drapers manage to exist all the year round at Fulton. I'm afraid that they barely exist—the country folk prefer to send to Dunedin for their goods,—but at sale time these two poor souls literally worry each other to death. If one has print at 3½d a yard, the other reduces it to 3¼d and so on."

By this time the two had reached their destination, and were threading their way through the crowds who thronged the counters.

"Bargain-hunters, every one of them," whispered Ellice; "this is the first day and each one wishes to pick up the choicest titbits."

Naomi was interested in the crush, and was not in any haste to do business on her own account, although some of the pretty articles, the reasonable prices of which obtrusively attracted her attention—captivated her woman's heart. Ellice's eyes roved here and there searching for desirable purchases, and presently she had quite a collection of sundries hanging on to her arm. She approached the counter, and her companion followed.

A brisk, busy saleswoman hastened to attend to her. "Are you ladies sure that we can do nothing more for you?" she asked with a glance at Mrs Maitland's empty hands.

"Quite sure," was Ellice's decided answer, while Naomi, with a mischievous expression in her eyes, demurely remarked "that she was merely shopping."

The saleswoman looked a little puzzled, but a few laughing words from Miss McPherson enlightened her, and then a corresponding twinkle appeared in her eyes.

"Your definition of shopping is very correct," she admitted ruefully, "as we saleswomen know to our cost. Some customers are dreadful. However, at sale time we do not indulge such nonsense as time is too limited."

"Do you like sales?" asked Naomi.

The girl behind the counter looked thoughtful. "I don't dislike the bustle," she answered, "but I cannot stand the

night work. And, of course, that, of necessity, is part of a sale. We have to come back and make our counters clear. That is usually, and always on the first day of the sale."

"Thank you," Ellice said quietly, taking up her change and the parcel. With a courteous "Good afternoon," the two moved away from the counters. After a further survey of the gifts (?) which the generous business man offered to one and all, they passed out into the street.

"I am delighted to breathe the bracing air again," exclaimed Ellice. "There are too many in the shop. You did not invest in anything."

"You desired me to go 'shopping,'" replied Mrs Maitland in self-defence, "and investments are not in your conception of that art."

"Quite true" (slowly), "but," with a sly, downward glance into the bright, girlish face, "I thought you might be tempted. Never mind, perhaps in the days to come remnants will tempt you. I have heard it said that married women spend much more money at sales than single women do."

Naomi turned the subject. "Let us go to Braithwaite's," she suggested, "and have a look at books. You can help me in my selection, although I do not wish to do any definite business to-day. Max might chance to spy my purchases before the time appointed."

Accordingly they turned their steps in the direction of the booksellers, and soon were absorbed in the task of selection.

"Do you like 'The Conqueror?'" Ellice asked, as she dipped into its pages. "It seems a powerfully written book."

"So it is," agreed a masculine voice. "I have read it."

Turning she was surprised to find Mr Holloway. "I have instructions to escort you to Gladstone street," he informed her. "Maitland has already taken possession of his wife, and in all probability they are home by this time."

The girl looked at her watch, and was amazed at the lateness of the hour. "Gracious," she ejaculated, "it is 5 o'clock."

"It is," was the dry response, "and poor

Max has had to go home and help to prepare tea. "Miss M'Pherson" (in a very severe tone), "I am afraid that you are leading his wife astray. She blamed you for her negligence. Have you no excuse to offer?"

She hesitated fearfully. "Were you a woman I might dare plead sales," she answered; "but being a man you would not understand."

"Umph" (still drily), "I have not had much direct experience of womankind, but I know that sales are the hunting ground of females of all descriptions. It is evidently a flaw in their composition."

"The only flaw, of course," ventured Ellice meekly, and laughing grimly Holloway answered in the affirmative.

By the time The Nest was reached the two were on very good terms with each other. Hitherto they had met in the company of others, and, as everyone knows, numbers are not conducive to the formation of friendship.

"I like your Mr Holloway very much," Ellice informed Naomi as they did the dishes together. "There is something youthful about him, notwithstanding his grey hair and the slight stoop."

"O!" (indignantly), "I am sure that he does not stoop; but of course he is old—he must be nearly 60."

"What a long while to live," said the nurse dreamily. "Imagine passing another 30 years on this earth."

"What a funny thing to say," cried Mrs Maitland with wide-open eyes. "I like to think of the years to come. It is nice to be young, and to look forward to the things one is going to accomplish."

"Of course it is," was the cheery answer, "but, you see, Naomi" (with a lapse into gravity), "I am just going to jog along in the ruts I have got into during the last few months."

"You are satisfied now?" rather timidly. Since that one burst of confidence, Ellice had maintained silence concerning her heartsickness.

"Yes, but" (wistfully) "30 years is a long while. In some ways I would rather be as near the end of my life as Mr Hol-

loway is. The burthen of life is sometimes hard to bear."

Naomi turned down the gas. "The dishes are done," she said. "Let us go and tease the menfolk." But before she moved from the little kitchen she put her arms round Ellice's neck and drew the fair head downward, so that the face was level with her own.

"Poor, old Ellice," she whispered sincerely, "there are blessings held in store for you somewhere in the future. Keep a brave heart."

"You are a dear, little comforter," the older girl told her, although with a shaky note in her voice. "Indeed you are one of the blessings you mention, only you are a present possession."

Methinks Ellice was right. There is nothing more helpful to a woman than the warm, sincere friendship of a sister woman.

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## CHAPTER XVIII. ELECTION DAY.

Stationary pools and people tend toward stagnation. The most senseless of proverbs is that about "the rolling stone that gathers no moss." What does it want of moss when it can get momentum?—Frances Willard.

All over New Zealand swept a breathless, hot wave of excitement. The great day in which the people were to use their power to crush the demon Alcohol had at last arrived, and those who for three years had been spending themselves and sending earnest prayers upward to the Great White Throne because of their earnest desire for the greatest good of the greatest number, worked and prayed with even greater activity. So much depended upon the next few hours. If the dread scourge were allowed to continue to afflict Dunedin, it meant that before another election day numbers of wives would see their husbands totter into drunkards' graves and innumerable mothers would wail because of the destruction of their first-born.

Vehicles raced to and from the various polling booths, around which were crowded all sorts and conditions of men. "Strike out the top line" was the motto of the

No-license party, and as each voter entered the fateful booth this or the License party's counsel was given gratis.

"Are we winning?" eagerly asked a grey-haired Temperance worker of a younger man. Max Maitland, for it was he, shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he answered dolefully, "but perhaps the tide will turn. So far I have noticed that the majority of voters at this booth were sympathisers of the Trade."

The questioner turned disconsolately away. He was one of those to whom the matter was of vital interest, for his only son, a lad of some 19 summers, was breaking his mother's heart by frequenting the bars.

Max was about to resume his occupation—he was relieving the driver of a gig—when a soft hand was placed on his arm and Naomi's voice greeted him.

"I am going to venture in now," she said quietly; "how are we getting on?"

"Not very well at this booth," he answered gloomily. "Never mind. You go in. Your vote will count one more on our side. Be sure and strike out the top line."

She smiled, and made her way through the crowd. When she returned Max had disappeared, and feeling rather desolate she turned her steps homeward. Arriving there she sank drearily into a chair. It was only 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and not until late in the evening would it be possible for the result of the polling to be made known.

"Heigho!" she exclaimed to the cat, "how ever can I possess my self in patience?"

Receiving no answer, she decided that the best thing to do was to take off her hat. Having fulfilled this duty she came back, and picking up a book endeavoured to concentrate her attention on the tale therein related. But her interest refused to be captivated, and turned resolutely to the true story of human hopes and fears of which that day was the climax.

Within the previous three months many means had been used to create within the masses a deep interest in the question of License or No-license, and every attempt had been made to open the eyes of the

blind to the havoc which alcohol, strongly aided by the open bar, had been and was making in their midst. A number of other earnest-souled lecturers had followed in the footsteps of Father Strong, and in their turn had helped to strengthen the No-license ranks. Many recruits had been made, and yet it seemed that, after all, the gallant attempt to achieve righteousness and the salvation of many would fail.

"I wish someone would come in," reflected the girl. "Anything would be better than this."

As though in answer to her thought, a knock resounded through the house, and, answering it, Naomi was surprised to see her next-door neighbour. The visitor looked a little embarrassed.

"I have come to ask your help," she commenced abruptly. "My father is an old man, and very frail, but he insists on going out to vote. Until now I had managed to keep the fact that this was election day from him, because I knew that he would insist on voting. I wonder if you would be good enough to call a vehicle of some description—something which he could easily step into—for him. The maid is out, and I dare not leave him long. Excuse the coolness of the request, but father is so frail that I am afraid to cross him lest he over-excite himself."

Mrs Maitland was completely amazed that the haughty young mistress of the next-door establishment should ask a favour of her was wonderful, nevertheless she answered courteously and quickly.

"Please make no apologies, but tell me, shall I call a License or a No-License conveyance?"

Miss Thornley smiled a little sadly. "My only brother ruined himself through drink," she explained quietly, "and that is the reason why my father wishes to do his best to keep it out of Dunedin."

Naomi hurriedly donned hat and gloves and walked up the path with Miss Thornley. "Have you voted yourself?" she asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "I stole out this morning." At the gate they parted, and Naomi hastened on her errand. At the

nearest booth she found Max, and to him she entrusted her mission. His astonishment was deep, but he promised to send a low carriage, and as the girl entered The Nest she saw the conveyance stop in front of Thornley's. Miss Thornley helped an old, white-haired man into it, and then followed him. She gave Naomi a grateful smile, and, with feelings much brighter than she had experienced half an hour previously, that individual returned to the sitting room. This time she did not sit idly down, but prepared tea, for Max would be home as soon as his services were no longer required at the booths. But it was not Max who first made demands upon her hospitality. Her deft fingers had just put the finishing touches to the dainty table when a familiar voice craved admittance, and Mr Holloway entered.

"This is a haven of refuge after the dust and heat of the day," he remarked as he ensconced himself comfortably on the couch.

Naomi laughed pleasantly. "It savours of prison to me to-day," she confessed. "I have been longing to be out and doing. However," she continued complacently, "I have been useful in some degree," and she explained.

The man was interested. "I know Thornley," he commented. "He used to be a fine fellow, but for years I have not seen him, and I thought him a helpless invalid."

"So he is. He never goes out of doors, and as his daughter helped him to the carriage he tottered. He must feel very strongly on the matter."

"No wonder," Holloway answered. "His only son was concerned in a drunken brawl. He killed a man and afterwards committed suicide."

"How dreadful," with a shudder, and Naomi resolved to try and become friendly with her next-door neighbours, although previously she had kept herself aloof because of their more abundant means and higher social position. "A man's a man for all that," she reflected, "and I believe that Miss Thornley understands the truth of this."

Holloway was more hopeful than Max had been. "We have a very good chance of winning," he assured the girl as they sat down to tea—Max had not appeared, and it was 6 o'clock. "I am very doubtful about the License victory."

And his companion rejoiced. Surely when an old man like Mr Thornley left his retirement and recorded his vote, the dreadful curse would be stamped out. Being confident of victory, her thoughts turned to the discomfited Trade.

"Do you think that those who lose their means of support should be compensated?" she asked.

The man shook his head sternly and decidedly. "Certainly not," he answered. Hitherto they had made great profits at the expense of their customers; now they can afford to lose in proportion. I ought to know," he added rather shamefacedly, "since I also was a gainer."

Presently Max came in. He was weary and dispirited. "I'm afraid," he said slowly, "very much afraid, but we must possess our souls in patience, and wait until the result of the polling is declared."

And so must my readers, for at the present moment the end of the three years' struggle is not yet known, and I (the writer) must leave the decision to be recorded by the newspapers.

And to the people who have twined themselves round my heartstrings I must say farewell. In confidence let me state that Max is succeeding beyond his expectations, which were high, in his new work, and is indulging in the hope that at some not far-distant date New Zealand will know and respect the name of Maxwell Maitland. In this hope Naomi shares. She vows that the book which her husband is writing will make him famous, and will endear him to the reading public. Methinks there is much probability that her prophecy will be fulfilled. And now, fare thee well until we meet again, with eager interest over the pages of the newspapers which record the results of the polling.

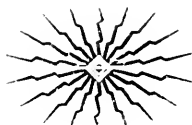
God holds the key of all unknown

And I am glad.

If other hands should hold the key,

Or if He trusted it to me,

I might be sad.







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